

**Queering the Canadian Labour Movement:
LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the British Columbia
Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)**

**by
Sarah Cibart**

Bachelor of Human Justice, University of Regina, 2016

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

© Sarah Cibart 2021
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2021

Declaration of Committee

Name: Sarah Cibart

Degree: Master of Arts

Title: Queering the Canadian Labour Movement:
LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the British Columbia
Government and Service Employees' Union
(BCGEU)

Committee:

Chair: Jen Marchbank
Professor, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's
Studies

Tiffany Muller Myrdahl
Co-supervisor
Senior Lecturer, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's
Studies

Helen Hok-Sze Leung
Co-supervisor
Professor, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

Kendra Strauss
Committee Member
Associate Professor, Labour Studies

Andrew Stevens
Examiner
Associate Professor, Industrial Relations & Human
Resource Manager, University of Regina

Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

- a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

- b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

or has conducted the research

- c. as a co-investigator, collaborator, or research assistant in a research project approved in advance.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Update Spring 2016

Abstract

This thesis presents findings and analysis drawn from semi-structured qualitative interviews with eleven members, staff, and leaders within the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) on their understandings and experiences of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the union. I situate this data within a critical framework that draws together concepts of social unionism and queer theory, asking how accessibility and power is understood in these literatures. The data reveals that LGBTQ2S+ specific education and training is needed within the BCGEU, that the BCGEU needs a LGBTQ2S+ advocate, and the structure of the union must become more accessible to increase more meaningful involvement from diverse workers, including LGBTQ2S+ workers. I conclude by emphasizing the need for more research in this area, particularly in the Canadian labour movement, and offer suggestions on how to ensure future research accounts for diverse perspectives.

Keywords: LGBTQ2S+; Canadian labour movement; accessibility; intersectionality; social unionism; queer theory

I dedicate this to my late grandpa, Calvin "Papa" Cibart, who taught me the importance of advocacy work, community building, and solidarity at all levels of the political world.

I miss you Papa, I felt your presence and wisdom with me every step of the way on this journey.



Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank the 11 contributors within the BCGEU who built the foundation of this project. It was an honour to learn from each of you, and your time and wisdom was deeply appreciated. This project is for you, and those LGBTQ2S+ workers it may reach.

Writing this thesis throughout a global pandemic, political activism in response to the ongoing racially motivated violence from police brutality, and pivotal political elections came with a lot of processing and need for support. I am forever grateful to my rock solid friends and family, including: Sara J, Jean, Russell, Matt, Zoë, Caroline, Wrye, Dania, Fred, The Burbarts, Auntie Jan, Cheyenne, Erin, Mummoo, Shila, Reith, Kaitlyn, my ever patient and loving partner Carrie, and my fierce and inspiring mamma Kerry.

Finally, I am so grateful for the brilliant activists, academics, and community that have provided me invaluable mentorship and support throughout this process. Vicky Smallman, Dr. Claire Carter, Barb Byers (CM), Donna Smith, Sussanne Skidmore with the BCFED, Kari Michaels with the BCGEU, Dr. Jen Marchbank, Dr. Andrew Stevens, Dr. Helen Hok-Sze Leung, and Dr. Kendra Strauss. Lastly, to my supervisor Dr. Tiffany Muller Myrdahl who taught me that this process can be enjoyable, even when you're terrified and anxious. Your attentiveness to both academic and personal support was appreciated every day.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee	ii
Ethics Statement.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Figures	ix
List of Acronyms	x
Glossary.....	xi
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1. Objectives	2
1.2. Gaps in Literature	2
1.3. Historical Context: Feminism and Union Advocacy	4
1.4. Thesis Organization	5
Chapter 2. Methodology	8
2.1. <i>Queering</i> Methodology.....	8
2.1.1. Research Questions.....	8
2.2. Coming Into the Project	9
2.3. Method & Goals	12
2.4. Recruitment & Demographics	14
2.5. Interview Process & Analysis.....	18
Chapter 3. Literature Review	22
3.1. Social Unionism	22
3.2. Queer Theory.....	24
3.3. Queering Social Unionism	27
3.4. Strength in a Queerer Labour Movement	29
3.5. Closing Thoughts	31
Chapter 4. Case Study: Structure of the BCGEU.....	32
4.1. Introduction	32
4.2. Structure & History of the BCGEU	32
4.3. Understanding Tools, Roles, and Events for LGBTQ2S+ Advocacy	35
4.3.1. Equity & Human Rights Committee.....	35
4.3.2. Shop Stewards, Grievances, & Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs)	37
4.3.3. Convention.....	38
Chapter 5. Data Findings.....	40
5.1. Introduction	40
5.2. Accessibility of the BCGEU Structure	41

5.2.1. Being Elected	43
5.3. The EHRC & LGBTQ2S+ Roundtable as Advocacy	44
5.3.1. Committees & Intersectional Experiences	47
5.4. Shop Stewards & CBAs	51
5.5. Convention & Leadership.....	55
5.5.1. Role of Leadership at the BCGEU	58
5.6. Beyond the Pride Parade.....	61
5.7. Fitting In / Being Out	64
5.8. Advocacy Beyond the Union	68
Chapter 6. Conclusion.....	71
6.1. Data Driven Recommendations	71
6.2. Thesis in Review.....	73
6.3. Limitations & Future Research.....	73
6.3.1. Two Spirit Experiences in Canadian Unions	73
6.3.2. Queering Labour and Union Density in Canada	76
6.4. Knowledge Mobilization (Academia and Beyond).....	76
6.5. Final Thoughts	77
References.....	79
Appendix A. Interview Guiding Questions	85
Appendix B. Recruitment Email	86
Appendix C. Consent Form.....	87
Appendix D. Demographic Information Form	92

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Racial Demographics	15
Figure 2.	Dis/Ability Demographics	17
Figure 3.	Years of Involvement.....	17
Figure 4.	Age Demographics	18
Figure 5.	Bargaining Units, Locals, Components	33
Figure 6.	BCGEU Structure	34
Figure 7.	Equity Committee	35

List of Acronyms

BCFED	British Columbia Federation of Labour
BCGEU	British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union
BCTF	British Columbia Teachers' Federation
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
EHRC	Equity and Human Rights Committee
GLB	Gay Lesbian Bisexual
GSA	Gender Sexuality Alliance
LGSM	Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners
LGBTQ2S+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer Two-Spirit (etc)
NDP	New Democratic Party
ORE	Office of Research and Ethics
PSUW	Prairie School for Union Women
SFL	Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
The GEU	Slang for the BC Government and Service Employees' Union
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers

Glossary

Bargaining Units	Separate groups that each has unique collective agreements made between the BCGEU and specific employers.
Being “Out”	UCLA/UFCW define being “out” as “whether LGBTQ+ people feel comfortable with coworkers [and their union] knowing about their identity, relationships, or family” (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.44).
Business Unionism	A more traditional, top-down approach from unions, and emphasizes the role of expert leadership action on behalf of and in the place of members (Ross, 2007).
Canadian Labour Congress	The CLC was founded in 1956 as a response to industrial and “big business” growth in Canada and now brings together international and national unions, as well as provincial and territorial federations of labour and community-based labour councils. Currently the CLC represents around 3 million workers in Canada (CLC, n.d.).
Caucus	An informal grouping of people who meet to discuss their common interests, including groups of members with common interests at a union conference or convention (CUPE, 2021).
Cisgender	Identifying with the gender that’s traditionally assigned to one’s sex at birth.
Convention	According to the BCGEU constitution (2015), the provincial executive and triennial constitutional convention are the governing bodies of the union. This means that the provincial executive governs between each convention and follows the union’s constitution and bylaws. At convention, members “elect the president, treasurer, and the four executive vice-presidents and determine what the mandate of the union will be over the next three years” (BCGEU, n.d.).
Equity and Human Rights Committee	The BCGEU describes the role of the Equity and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) as “provid[ing] policy recommendations to the Provincial Executive, which brings an equity lens to bargaining proposals, member education, coalition work, and a range of events and activities” (BCGEU100, 2019). According to the BCGEU Constitution, “the [E]quity and [H]uman [R]ights [C]ommittee will consist of two members from each designated equity group” including: workers with disabilities, Indigenous workers, workers of colour, and LGBTQ2S+ workers.

Grievance	Union members can “file a grievance” with their steward, when matters of the CBA or other protected grounds under labour or human rights laws have been violated.
ISMs	A way of referring to different forms of systemic discrimination- i.e. racism, sexism, ableism, etc.
Locals	Locals represent members in specific regions within BC, have their own bylaws, and elect officers (such as chairperson, VP, treasurer, secretary). Locals also elect representatives to the component executive.
Organized/Organizing	Belonging to the union.
Pansexual	Romantic, sexual and/or affectional desire for all genders/sexes (can overlap with bisexual and queer identities).
Poly	Poly, which is often short for polyamorous, typically denotes being in or open to multiple relationships and connections at the same time.
Provincial & Territorial Federations of Labour	Provincial organizing bodies belonging to the national Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).
Public Services	Including provincial government workers and public sector workers such as in health care, community-based social services, and education.
Queer Methodology	Browne & Nash (2010) define queer methodologies and methods as: approaching research “positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting in power relations” (p.17). I build upon this definition, utilizing a methodology that queers the notion of the researcher as expert, but instead focus’ research to be used beyond academia, for the communities that contributed to it in the first place (Nagar, 2014).
Queer Theory	Contesting the notion of defined and finite identity categories, norms, and binaries (Jagose, 1996).
Resolutions	Resolutions are generated, voted upon, and submitted at the local level to convention and may ask the union to take a position on an important issue, implement a new policy, and/or change the constitution or structure of the BCGEU. Resolutions are voted on by attendees at the convention and must pass with a straight majority.
Social Unionism	In 1993, Stinson and Richmond defined social unionism as the recognition “that union members lives are not limited to their paid jobs alone” (Stinson & Richmond, 1993, p.50).

Socialist Feminism	Can be understood as “combin[ing] a left critique of capitalism and imperialism with a feminism that address not just ‘women’s issues’ but the world, root, and branch” (Cockburn, 1984, p.45).
Stewards	Stewards represent workers at the worksite and intervene when a member is “being treated unfairly” (BCGEU, n.d.). Stewards are also “responsible for making sure the collective agreement is enforced at the worksite” and can file a grievance for a member (BCGEU, n.d.).
Truth and Reconciliation Commission	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) comes out of the Indian Schools Settlement Agreement. It’s mandated is “to inform Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools” and “document the truth of survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected” by this experience (TRC, 2021).
Two-Spirit	Two Spirit (sometimes referred to as Two-Spirit, two spirit, or 2S) was a term first coined in 1990 at the Native American and Canadian Aboriginal LGBT people gathering in Winnipeg. The founding group used it as a term to reflect the “historical acceptant of gender-variant peoples and diverse sexual identities within Indigenous communities in pre-contact times” (OUTSaskatoon, n.d.). As an umbrella term, Two Spirit captures the roles people held prior to colonization, though notably the “specific teaching, roles, meanings, and language must come from the community” (OUTSaskatoon, n.d.). After Elder Myra Laramee coined this term as an identity, she shared her vision of her Anishinaabemowin name of niizh manidoowag which translates closely to “having the ability to be neutral through the lens of having both feminine spirit and masculine spirit within one’s body” (OUTSaskatoon, n.d.). While this identity is specific to being Indigenous, Two Spirit is not a term used interchangeably to refer to all Indigenous LGBTQ2S+ or Indigenous Queer experiences (UBC Two-Spirit & Indigiqueer Studies, 2020). As I argue for more research on colonialism within unions, this includes considering experiences and impacts of those who identify as Two Spirit, and those who are Indigenous LGBTQ+ workers.
Union Density	The numbers of workers who are members of a union.

Union Renewal

“...organizing the unorganized, increasing member participation to facilitate mobilization for change, coalition formation within the external community and other social movement organizations to increase the efficacy of political action, merging to free up resources, more training to improve leadership effectiveness and membership commitment to union goals, and partnering with employers and government to advance and protect member interests” (Foley, 2009, p.4). In other words, advancing the equity of marginalized workers is central to the concept of union renewal, thus it is closely tied to notions of social unionism and what Keenan (2015) describes as “solidarity unionism” (p.211).

Union/Staff Rep

Within the BCGEU, union rep or representative is a term often used interchangeably with staff rep or representative, both refer to employees of the union who engage in duties such as collective bargaining, grievance procedures, and community outreach.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

The first time I really learned about LGBTQ2S+ activism happened to be through union education at a summer camp put on by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. I was 13 years old and was totally excited to discuss what “isms”¹ were, especially on the topic of heterosexism and homophobia. At camp we also learned about what a “union” meant in the context of the Canadian labour movement, which most of us only paid attention to because as campers, we got to collectively bargain for the rules that would govern the rest of camp. Having a space where I got to find friends *and* talk about social activism had an impact on me for the rest of my life. I finally felt like I fit in.

Throughout my young adulthood, I remained active in the Canadian labour movement, working and volunteering for union and political events put on by the New Democrat Party (NDP), mostly to maintain community. In 2010 I attended an event called the Prairie School for Union Women (PSUW) that was lead by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The criterion to attend PSUW reads: “whether you are a woman who is a long time activist or just starting to get involved in your union, this school is open to you” (SFL, 2021). This event was packed full of signs reading “the future is female”, with Rosie the Riveter on the participant tote bag, and complimentary union branded nail files inside. Attendees and facilitators shared stories of organizing, about bringing gestures of feminist advocacy (such as women’s committees and conferences) to the labour movements. Tears were shed at the microphone.

As a young union activist who identifies as a woman, I connected with parts of PSUW and the messages of women’s empowerment at work and in the union resonated with me. However, I also knew that for me, and for many others who were present, the feminine, heteronormative, white, able-bodied portrayal of being a union member did not align with my identity. In witnessing efforts by the Canadian labour movement to engage in advocacy for diverse members, I became interested in how these efforts have been

¹ This was the way we were taught to understand different forms of systemic discrimination- i.e. *racism, sexism, ableism, etc.*

received by marginalized workers. Identifying as queer, I began to question specifically lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning, Two Spirit, and more (LGBTQ2S+²) worker experiences.

1.1. Objectives

This thesis will make two contributions to the literatures on Canadian unions as well as LGBTQ2S+ worker advocacy. First, by bringing together scholarship on social unionism and queer theory, I build a framework that explores how these literatures can work together to strengthen understandings of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the Canadian labour movement. Second, I use this framework to examine a case study of the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (the BCGEU), and analyze perspectives shared by members, staff, and leadership within the union. The case study not only offers an opportunity to speak to LGBTQ2S+ identified union members, staff, and leadership, but also considers ways that the BCGEU's approach to worker advocacy could be *queered*. I offer three findings as a result of the literature review and data analysis. First, LGBTQ2S+ education and training is needed internally within the BCGEU. Second, the BCGEU needs a specific advocate for LGBTQ2S+ member concerns. Third, the structure of the BCGEU needs to be more accessible to members for more LGBTQ2S+ workers to become involved in union advocacy and leadership. Finally, this thesis aims to: fill gaps in academic literature concerning LGBTQ2S+ worker experiences in unions in Canada (including within disciplines such as labour studies and gender studies), and further, to reach union members, leaders, and staff within the Canadian labour movement and contribute to a growing body of best practices for advocating for LGBTQ2S+ workers.

1.2. Gaps in Literature

Currently there is a lack of literature and data on the impacts of unions for LGBTQ2S+ workers in Canada. A Canadian study by Pride at Work and the Canadian

² While this acronym varies across literatures, I chose LGBTQ2S+ to be as inclusive and consistent when referring to queer and trans identities throughout the thesis. Further, the BCGEU and Canadian labour movement more broadly were using LGBTQ2S+ as the reference acronym when I began writing the thesis. As of early 2021, they have since shifted to 2SLGBTQ+ to highlight Two Spirit identity.

Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (2015) stated that 62% of LGBTQ Canadians have experienced or witnessed discrimination related to gender and/or sexual orientation in the workplace (p.7). However in this study, no measurement was taken of whether unionization impacted these experiences. In their³ dissertation *Towards a Queerer Labor Movement: The Politics and Potential of LGBT-Labor Coalition*, Raechel Tiffe (2013) unpacks the relationship between LGBTQ2S+ advocacy and the American labor movement noting, “there is a noticeable lack of literature about LGBT union members, and even less that queers the labor movement” (p.11).

Tiffe’s observation on the lack of American literature on LGBTQ2S+ members certainly holds for Canadian research on LGBTQ2S+ workers and unions, with the small group of examples covering a broad analysis nationally⁴ or within Ontario unions (Hunt & Eaton, 2007; Salah, 2014; Paavo & Hanson, 2019). One exception to this is a recent bi-national study of LGBTQ2S+ members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) in Canada and the United States, conducted in partnership with the UCLA Labor Centre. The findings of this project were released well into my own research for this project in early 2021; therefore I was unable to fully integrate the findings into my own research⁵. With this said, their project also found that

...there has been limited research about working conditions for LGBTQ+ people in terms of health and safety, unequal treatment on the job, and access to benefits. Likewise, there is very limited information about the leadership of LGBTQ+ workers in contemporary union organizing or the scope and effects of union support for LGBTQ+ workers’ rights (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.4).

With this gap in mind, throughout this project I note some helpful overlaps between American and Canadian literature on unions and LGBTQ2S+ worker advocacy. For example, Honey (2000), notes a similar need for research of marginalized members within unions in the United States that applies in Canada:

³ I will use they/them pronouns in referring to authors throughout this thesis unless their preferred pronoun is explicitly indicated.

⁴ Statistics Canada has archived only one survey of union members and their perspective of unionization, which was in 1984.

⁵ Most references to the UCLA/UFCW project I’ve made are within the data discussion and findings of this project. While this project used a different union as a case study and had abundantly more data, I note a lot of overlap in research areas and results of our projects.

[A]s the earlier generations of industrial union activists die out, it becomes increasingly important to incorporate black and minority worker memories into an understanding of where the labo[u]r movement has been and where it may be going. Their memories especially illuminate the hidden struggles of people suffering the double and triple burdens of race, class, and gender oppression. (Honey, 2000, p.67)

While this project cannot adequately explore the ways racialized workers experience marginality within the Canadian labour movement or the BCGEU, there are important overlaps in my data findings for strengthening LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BCGEU that can and should be applied to other marginalized groups with the union.

1.3. Historical Context: Feminism and Union Advocacy

Despite these gaps in the literatures on Canadian unions and LGBTQ2S+ worker advocacy, there is an important history of feminist analysis within the Canadian labour movement that has explored marginality of certain union members (Briskin, 1996, 2006, 2007; Creese, 1995; Hanson & Paavo, 2019; Stinson & Richard, 1993). Notably, this longstanding effort to consider accessibility and advocacy of vulnerable workers inside unions has actually been repackaged as part of a movement to “save” the labour movements in North America through “union renewal⁶” (Farnhill, 2018; Keenan, 2015; Kumar & Schenk, 2006; Voss, 2010; Yates, 2019).

Janice Foley (2009) argues that while “union renewal” has been claimed as new and cutting edge, the majority of its tenets “overlap significantly” with feminist activisms. Foley (2009) argues that scholars claiming that a revamp on union structure to be more accessible and inclusive is a new concept, the years of feminist and equity activists seem invisible and ultimately co-opted. Worse yet, Foley (2009) notes that these requests by feminist and equity labour activists have “tended to be ignored” and their results have been “under-represented” within Canadian labour organizations (p.17).

⁶ Foley (2009) defines union renewal to include “organizing the unorganized, increasing member participation to facilitate mobilization for change, coalition formation within the external community and other social movement organizations to increase the efficacy of political action, merging to free up resources, more training to improve leadership effectiveness and membership commitment to union goals, and partnering with employers and government to advance and protect member interests” (p.4). In other words, advancing the equity of marginalized workers is central to the concept of union renewal, thus it is closely tied to notions of social unionism and what Keenan (2015) describes as “solidarity unionism” (p.211).

In other words, the prioritization of marginalized members is only evident when it contributes to union growth, and not because of genuine attempts at solidarity and equity. Even back in 1984, socialist feminist⁷ Cynthia Cockburn argued that feminists in unions get “granted” women-only committees, courses, conferences, and something that *looks* like autonomy, while “women’s relationship to [the] *power* [in unions]...remains unarticulated” (p.45). Evidently, feminist labour activists have been advocating for more diverse, equitable, and accessible unions for a long time.

I highlight this historical context for two reasons. First, this project itself builds upon advocacy work that has been well established by feminists in labour movements for years, and I do not wish to claim them as “new”. Second, while the critiques made by Foley and Cockburn focus primarily on “female” or feminist advocacy, LGBTQ2S+ members needs remain side lined. While cisgender women were introducing “renewed” ways of approaching union organizing, I suspect those who identified and/or expressed as non-binary or transgender did as well, but remained invisible. Unfortunately non-binary and trans voices and stories have been largely left out of union history documentation or even critique (as we see with feminist response such as Foley’s) (2006). Trish Salah (2014) speaks to the ways the leadership in the Canadian labour movement might say they are committed to trans and non-binary advocacy, but in practice this advocacy is missing and these advocates become sidelined. This issue of unequal attention within LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the Canadian labour movement contributes to the pressing need for grounded and diverse LGBTQ2S+ narratives as captured in this project.

1.4. Thesis Organization

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 begins exploring the research questions driving the project, and choices that contributed to shaping them. Further, Chapter 2 explores the methods used in the project and goals for the research, explains the recruitment processes used, and discusses the self identified demographics of the data participants. Chapter 2 concludes by overviewing the interview process and approach to data analysis, and plans for finding dissemination.

⁷ Socialist feminism can be understood as “combin[ing] a left critique of capitalism and imperialism with a feminism that address not just ‘women’s issues’ but the world, root, and branch” (Cockburn, 1984, p.45).

Chapter 3 offers an in depth look at the literatures contributing to the critical framework of this thesis. First I explore what a social union framework is, according to Ross (2007). Next I explore how queer theory understands marginality and undoing homogenized approaches to advocacy. Finally, I explore how these frameworks affect one another in the context of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy in the Canadian labour movement, particularly as it pertains to the hierarchical structure and accessibility of the union.

Chapter 4 provides an overview the BCGEU structurally, to allow for context of the case study data discussion. In this chapter I give a brief history of the BCGEU, define key terms used by the union (and therefore by the interview participants), and explain various human rights centered roles, tools, and events within the union. Because these details are relevant to analyzing the interview data, I also discuss the function and organizational understanding of shop stewards, grievances, and collective bargaining agreements.

Having explained some key structures, features, and roles of the BCGEU, I then lead into a discussion of the project data acquired in Chapter 5. This discussion is situated around quotations from participants that featured key themes such as: (in)accessibility to become involved or elected within the structure of the BCGEU, experiences and navigating intersectionality within the BCGEU Equity and Human Rights Committee and the LGBTQ2S+ roundtable event, the role of shop stewards and LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within collective bargaining agreements, and understanding the role of convention and leadership and how this impacts LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BCGEU. Chapter 5 concludes with participant experiences and critiques of primary advocacy systems promoted by the BCGEU such as: the Pride parade and union education schools, and highlights participants desires to see the BCGEU engaged in LGBTQ2S+ advocacy beyond the union community.

Chapter 6 begins with three key findings from the data specifically pertaining to the BCGEU: the BCGEU needs to be more accessible to increase LGBTQ2S+ member involvement and leadership, the BCGEU needs to receive and provide LGBTQ2S+ specific education, and the BCGEU needs a LGBTQ2S+ advocate within the union. I then summarize the thesis overall, and propose next steps for further research in the area of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy in the Canadian labour movement. Finally, I conclude the thesis by offering suggestions for the dissemination of the research findings from the

thesis, such as suggestions for applying research findings for LGBTQ2S+ advocacy beyond the BCGEU into the broader Canadian labour movement.

Chapter 2.

Methodology

2.1. *Queering Methodology*

“Can we have queer knowledges if our methodologies aren’t queer?”
(Browne & Nash, 2010, p.16)

2.1.1. Research Questions

Browne & Nash (2010) define queer methodologies and methods as: approaching research “positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting in power relations” (p.17). I build upon this definition, utilizing a methodology that queers the notion of the researcher as expert, but instead focus’ research to be used beyond academia, for the communities that contributed to it in the first place (Nagar, 2014).

While researchers employing queer methods tend to be highly interdisciplinary in their use of poststructuralist, postmodernist, anti-racist and post colonial scholars, Browne & Nash (2010) argue that “there is a certain sweeping under the carpet of how [these researchers] actually ‘do’ research as ‘social scientists’.”(p.15). This demand for explicit attention to methodological process informs how I navigated this project. To name one example: not only is this project seeking to investigate the ways power relations have impacted LGBTQ2S+ advocacy at the BCGEU, it also was designed to empower participants to centre conversations (interviews) in directions which most served their realities, stories, and experiences in the union. By allowing the participants to inform the data, rather than have them confirm or deny my own understandings of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within unions, I utilized a non-normative and thereby queer methodology, rejecting the notion of the researcher being an expert in control of a project built to confirm or deny their hypothesis.

This project is informed from my own experiences as a queer union member, as well as experiences of those of BCGEU members, those serving as union leaders, and paid union staff people. Through a breadth of data gathered, this project was driven by a

few questions that served to guide the selection of literature, frameworks for analysis, and construction of interview questions. The following questions developed to consider the wisdom and experiences of members, employees, and leaders within the British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU).

- What is the culture of the BCGEU as it relates to human rights advocacy for workers (namely LGBTQ2S+ workers)?
- What experiences have members, staff, and leaders with the BCGEU had concerning gender and sexuality?
- How does the BCGEU implement LGBTQ2S+ advocacy? How have these advocacy efforts been received by the BCGEU staff, members, and leadership? What suggestions do staff, members, and leadership have for LGBTQ2S+ advocacy at BCGEU?
- To what extent are the LGBTQ2S+ advocacy efforts at the BCGEU intersectional?
- Is there a notable difference between the perceptions of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy between staff, members, and leadership at BCGEU? How impactful are the differences?

2.2. Coming Into the Project

I was introduced to union activism around the same time as LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. Although I was raised in part by my aunt who identified as a lesbian, I didn't really find myself invested in education and advocacy of LGBTQ2S+ rights until I attended a social justice summer camp from ages 13-16, which was funded by unions in Saskatchewan and offered both education on the labour movement and various human rights issues that impact workers. Following the years I attended the summer camp, I worked as a summer student at the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL)⁸, facilitated education workshops at the Prairie School for Union Women, and started the first gender-sexuality alliance (GSA, formally called gay-straight alliance) at my Christian high school. When I was 18, I came out as bisexual (although I most identify now as being queer), and began volunteering as an educator with the RCMP training academy

⁸ The provincial organizing body belonging to the national Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The CLC was founded in 1956 as a response to industrial and "big business" growth in Canada and now brings together international and national unions, as well as provincial and territorial federations of labour and community-based labour councils. Currently the CLC represents around 3 million workers in Canada (CLC, n.d.).

on LGBTQ2S+ awareness and hate crimes. In 2018 I moved to Vancouver and worked in a part time, temporary position at BCGEU.

Part of my role while working with BCGEU was answering calls from members looking for advocacy from the union. My job was listening to members who had experienced discrimination at work; subsequently, I was to connect them with a shop steward or union representative⁹. This process left me to wonder: what experience, training, education, and infrastructure does the union have to advocate for LGBTQ2S+ members? In confronting these questions and gaps in research, I decided to pursue this project and conduct qualitative, semi-structured interviews with members, staff, and leaders at the BCGEU about their understandings of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the union.

Throughout this project I have felt pulled between academic research and practical community needs from working class queers. In this tension I see myself as both an “insider” (as a precarious queer union member myself) as well as a “outsider” researcher, benefitting from participant time and labour while occupying the role of representing the ivory tower. Beverly Mullings (1999) argues that constructing this insider/outsider tension as a binary is unstable and unhelpful, as positionality is not fixed to *identity* but rather there are “positional spaces” to which both researchers and respondents occupy at various times (p.340). Similarly Nagar and Geiger (2014) understand this notion of positionality as “shifting, contextual, and relational contours of the researcher’s social identity and her social situatedness...with respect to her subjects” (p. 82).

Attention to positionality played out in two ways in this project. First, it informed the flexible approach I adopted with my interview questions. Being cognisant of positional spaces which I have moved into and out of as a union activist, paid staff member, dues payer, and critic, I was mindful in the development of the methodology of this project to allow for a great deal of space and flexibility for participant-led response (Cahill, 2007, p.182). I was intentional to not be overly prescriptive in the implementation of my research questions and hypothesis, and thus kept the interview questions very

⁹ Within the BCGEU, union rep or representative is a term often used interchangeably with staff rep or representative, both refer to employees of the union who engage in duties such as collective bargaining, grievance procedures, and community outreach.

open ended and guided by the direction that participants took with their responses (Longhurst, 2010).

Second, my understanding of positionality shaped how I approached transparency and notions of power and privilege. Nagar and Geiger (2014) suggest feminist researchers ought to ask how feminist research can produce knowledges without reinscribing the interest of the privileged. In other words, I wanted to ensure that this project captured data that helped better understand advocacy for those at the margins within the union. Further, transparency with participants around my own power and privilege was crucial in the interview process. I was very clear with participants about my history occupying insider and outsider positions through being a union member and academic. I also reinforced at the beginning of every interview that any question I was asking participants, they too could ask me. Lastly, I sent all interview participants both a blank demographic information form to be filled out as well as a form that I filled out myself, so they could learn the same identity details about myself that I was asking them to share with me. Another reason I chose to fill out the demographic form and shared my response with participants was to allow participants to see my own privilege and subsequent blind spots- not only as a university educated person, but to learn that I was white, English speaking, non-disabled, and cisgender. In reflecting on the subtle ways power and privilege played out in the research process, I revisited a note I made after two participants brought up worries that they'd chosen a "weird" or "wrong" pseudonym:

Be sure to include a note that all pseudonyms were welcomed in the project, given that two participants asked if their choice of name was ok. Could I have been more explicit about encouraging participants that any pseudonym chosen would be used? (Annotation Notes, July 20, 2020)

There's also no denying that sharing that I was a queer identified person was a choice I made, utilizing my researcher power, and that choice changed the research process. Tiffe (2013) shares this experience as well, noting that part of their methodology was the ability to blend into "queer spaces"- acknowledging that by "getting a queer joke" respondents were more comfortable and willing to share throughout the research process. In other words, my transparency was also used for my own researcher gain, and in no way do I see my role as a researcher under the illusion of being "neutral" (England, 1994, p.81; Mullings, 1999; Tiffe, 2013, p.29).

In recognizing the power I could yield as an “insider” researcher and choosing to disclose that I was queer to participants, I reminded myself of Browne & Nash’s (2010) definition of queer methodology as acknowledging “taken for granted” power dynamics in the research process. In some ways, disclosing my own identity was for my own gain to enrich the data. However, I did not take this opportunity “for granted” (p.17). By acknowledging this power I had as a researcher, I became further invested in ensuring the participants confidentiality was maintained, and motivated to ensure this project and findings were to improve the union environment and advocacies for participants themselves.

2.3. Method & Goals

In developing the method for this project, I thought often of Nagar and Geiger’s (2014) question: how can the production of knowledges be tied explicitly to a politics of social change (p.82)? I wanted to build a project with a small and specific enough scope, that the findings could be utilized specifically within a given union. Considering the scope and feasible size of a Masters project, I chose the BCGEU as the sole union to consider LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within. Choosing the BCGEU was in part due to the privilege of having worked as a support staff on a temporary contract at the lower mainland office, which gave me a head start at building connections with leadership to promote the project and work collaboratively with them. Further, the BCGEU states that it is “one of the largest and most diverse unions in British Columbia” which piqued my interest, and inspired me to investigate both whether members, staff, and leadership felt this was true in regards to the ways the union has taken up LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. I also wanted to examine whether there were inconsistencies and difference between how staff, leaders, and members perceived this (BCGEU, n.d.). Lastly, I chose the BCGEU for the diversity of the workers they represent (being both public and private service sector)- from childcare, to natural resource management, to workers at credit unions, and within education, health care, municipalities, and more (BCGEU, n.d.). Moreover, the BCGEU has over 80,000 members, making it one of ¹⁰ BC’s largest unions.

¹⁰ Alongside the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) BC and the BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF).

It was important to me that the qualitative interviews I conducted remained semi-structured and *very* open ended (see Appendix A for guiding questions). I wanted this queer methodology to embody traits of participant action research (PAR), which “troubles traditional notions of ‘expert outsider’ and instead encourages researchers to...view ‘subjects’ as ‘co-researchers’” (Tiffe, 2013, p.31). PAR encourages research that is not “relegated to the confines of academia” and instead “builds bridges with the communities that exist outside the university” (Tiffe, 2013, p.30). In other words, for PAR to be possible, the interview method had to account for unpredictable directions that the respondents could take their replies under the broad theme of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy at the BCGEU. While PAR as a method would have been ideal for this project¹¹, it was not possible for this project due to lack of time, size of team, and financial sustainability. Rather, I adopted elements from the core tenets of PAR to guide my method more broadly.

My choice to use semi-structured interviews as the data gathering instrument of my method was primarily due to the fact that they are “useful for investigating complex behaviours, opinions and emotions, and for collecting a variety of experiences” (Longhurst, 2020, p.112). As I wanted to capture perspectives on LGBTQ2S+ advocacy from members, leaders, and staff, I felt semi-structured interviews would be beneficial as a method given that it allowed me to hold space for each of these groups to share their thoughts openly, utilizing pseudonyms for confidentiality¹². I did not want the data of this thesis to be sanitized or politicized, especially since I wanted to talk to staff and leadership of the union. I could also imagine members being worried about their place in union activism if they were to speak openly and critically about the union and previous LGBTQ2S+ advocacy attempts. Furthermore, some respondents were not out as LGBTQ2S+, and affiliation with this project could have caused reservation for participating. Thus, I decided semi-structured interviews rather than expert interviews would allow participants to have their honest responses “protected” by confidential pseudonyms.

¹¹ Deepening understandings of LGBTQ2S+ (and other marginalized experiences) advocacies within the Canadian labour movement through PAR would be an excellent expansion for future PhD level research.

¹² In addition to all participants having pseudonyms, many specifically asked to ensure no identifying information was built into the data findings, such as details about where they work or which union committees they sat on.

2.4. Recruitment & Demographics

The first stage of the recruitment process was meeting with Kari Michaels, the BCGEU's elected executive vice president. Kari and I met multiple times to discuss the history of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy at BCGEU, and how this research project could be helpful for the union. Upon approval from the SFU Office of Research and Ethics (ORE), I drafted an email (see Appendix B) that was sent internally to all BCGEU staff and leaders, as well as the BCGEU members who were affiliated to a LGBTQ2SIS+ Equity Roundtable mailing list (connected to an event the BCGEU held in February 2019). Admittedly, I was disappointed at first that the email was only being sent to members who were on the roundtable mailing list, as I was concerned the project would only be able to capture the perspectives of members who were engaged and recognized as LGBTQ2S+ advocates already. With that said, due to snowball sampling and a second call for participation emails were sent two months later, and I was able to speak with folks who had not heard of the roundtable previously, and were in no way involved with activism within the BCGEU. Although many people were interested in participating in the project, 11 respondents¹³ completed the required paperwork and were included in the project.

All prospective interview participants were sent a consent form (Appendix C) and a demographic information form (Appendix D) to be filled out (as well as a demographic information form that was filled out by myself). The demographic information form¹⁴ allowed me to gain a better sense of the historical and cultural context from which the participants came prior to the interviews. Although this project did not exhaustively capture the impact of intersectional experiences due to its scope and size, at a bare minimum, I wanted to be transparent about what different positionalities and diversities participants held. Lastly, the demographic information form served to allow respondents to choose their own pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

¹³ Overall, 15 people expressed interest in participating in the project, meaning four interested people didn't end up participating. Two did not follow through with sending back required paperwork to participate, and two others I had to "wait list" as there was an abundance of data from the first few interviews and I was reaching a capacity to conduct any further interviews. I was expecting a higher interest rate in the project, however, I suspect Covid-19 impacted the (lack) of interested prospective participants since the interviews were conducted in the summertime while lockdown was still happening in Vancouver.

¹⁴ This form was adapted from a template made at York University.

Upon analysis of participant demographics, some significant gaps remain in this project. Firstly, all 11 respondents identified as cisgender¹⁵. This gap is somewhat unsurprising, given the history of academic research used to further perpetuate violence against trans, non-binary, and Two Spirit people (Turban, 2020). Not only are the risks more serious¹⁶ for trans, non-binary, and Two Spirit people to out themselves for the sake of research, we also operate in a culture that is constantly asking people on the margins to offer their personal trauma and emotional labour to educate people of privilege in power (Pascoe et al., 2020). Boellstorff et al. (2014) further point out that “we researchers, most of whom are not trans, profit from doing work on or addressing trans issues and people, while the majority of trans people (around the world) are disempowered, disorganized, and doing poorly” (p.422). While the need for trans and non-binary workers advocacy came up a lot in the interview data, research for trans workers written by trans researchers is certainly needed in this area.

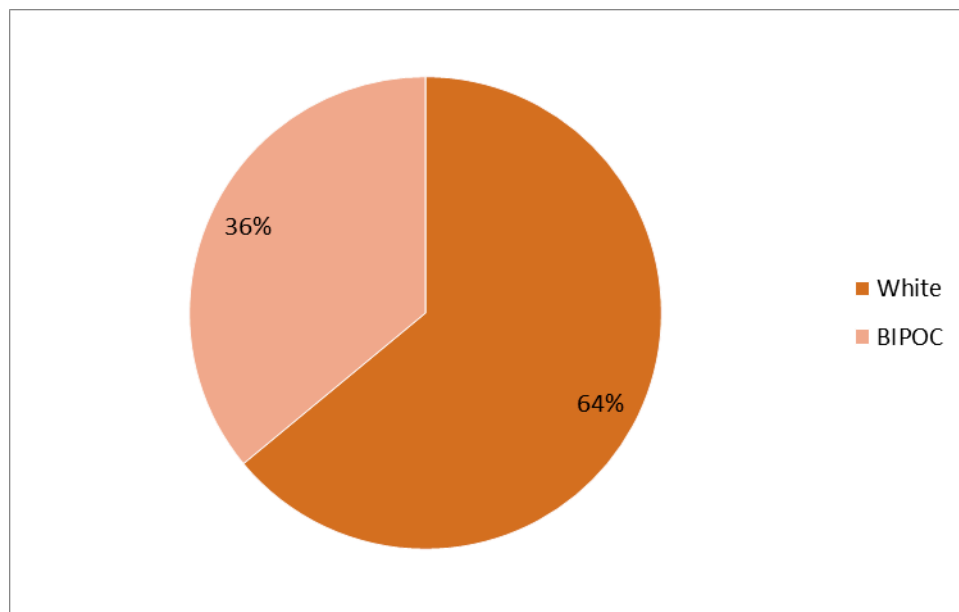


Figure 1. Racial Demographics

¹⁵ Identifying with the gender that's traditionally assigned to one's sex at birth (Mombourquette, 2020).

¹⁶ Those who identify as non-cisgender are more likely than cisgender Canadians to have experienced violence by age 15, and are more likely to experience discrimination and harassment at work in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018).

It's also unsurprising that only 4 of 11 participants identified as BIPOC¹⁷. Although the Canadian labour movement certainly speaks highly of their commitment to anti-racist advocacy, it is also important to consider the racist history that unions hold in Canada: "For those who were non-white/non-European, the historical work in Canada was characterized by jobs that were not only low paid, but often...subject to intense racism from employers, the Canadian government, trade unions, and the white working class" (Jackson and Thomas, 2017, p.121). The data of this project showed that issues concerning racism and white supremacy within the BCGEU are still active today, including a lack of BIPOC folks in leadership, and the usurping of BIPOC specific spaces by leadership. Should this area of research expand, I think it is important to consider ways to better support potential respondents who identify as non-cisgender and BIPOC, through compensation for their labour and/or more involvement in the construction of the project.

Finally, there was a notable gap concerning location: whereas nine respondents lived in cities across BC, two lived rurally. According to Ontario researcher Suzanne Mills (2020), "much of the research to date has been focused on large urban areas...so we don't know much about [LGBTQ2S+ workers in] small places or smaller cities" (quoted in CBC News, 2020). Here again, I would suggest future research consider this persisting gap in understanding LGBTQ2S+ experiences in Canadian unions.

In the recruitment for the project, it was explicitly stated that although the project concerned LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BCGEU, anyone of any identity was welcome to participate. Of the 11 participants, 4 identified as heterosexual/straight, and 7 identified as non-heterosexual, under identities including: bisexual, pansexual¹⁸, gay, lesbian, poly¹⁹, and queer. Three participants identified as cisgender men, 8 as cisgender women.

¹⁷ Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Colour.

¹⁸ Romantic, sexual and/or affectional desire for all genders/sexes (can overlap with bisexual and queer identities).

¹⁹ Poly, which is often short for polyamorous, typically denotes being in or open to multiple relationships and connections at the same time.

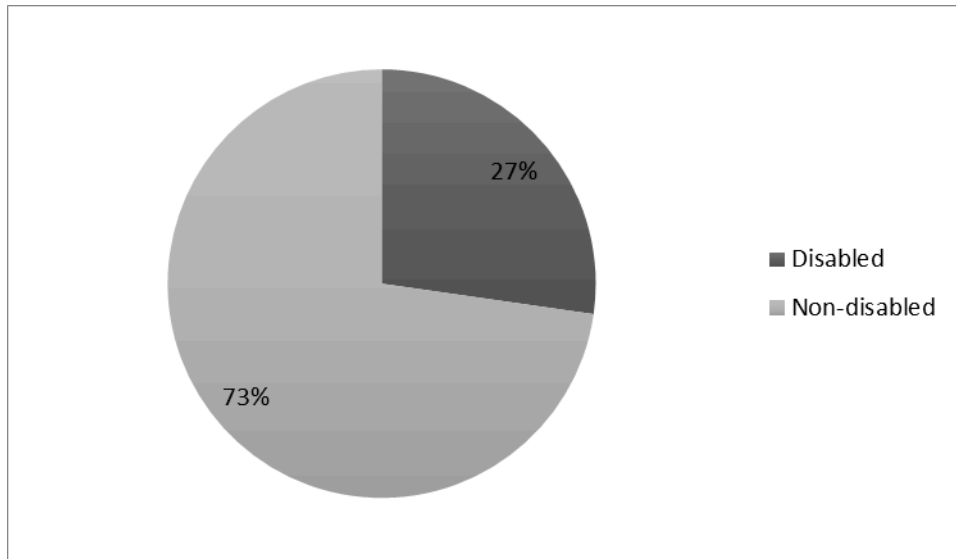


Figure 2. Dis/Ability Demographics

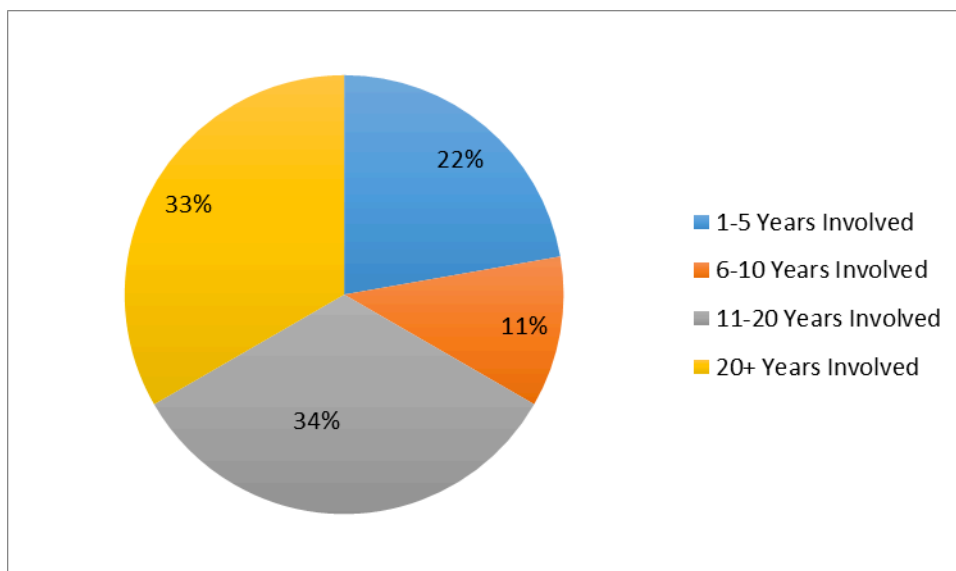


Figure 3. Years of Involvement

Whereas 3 participants identified as having a disability, 8 responded as not having a disability. Finally, the median age for of the respondents was 44 years old, the youngest respondent being 26 years old and the oldest 63 years old. Five respondents were under 35 years old, whereas 7 respondents were over 35 years old.

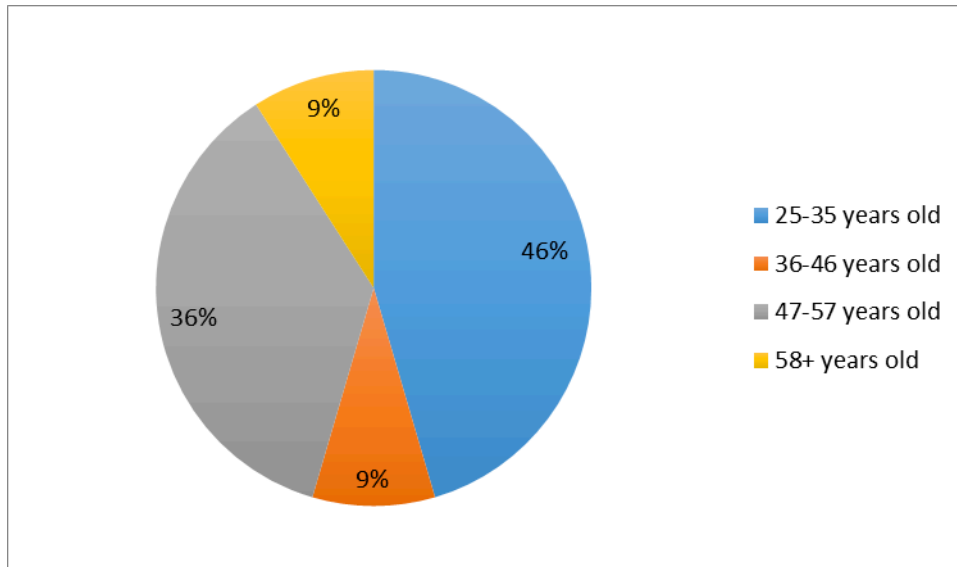


Figure 4. Age Demographics

All participants were asked to contextualize their role and experience within BCGEU. One respondent was a current employee, and 1 was currently in an elected leadership role. This means 9 respondents were considered “general members”; however, some noted they were members on the BCGEU human committees (2), and/or shop stewards (2). The median length of years being in (or working for) BCGEU was 15 years- the least being 2 years and the most being 26 years. Two participants did not disclose how long they had been members of BCGEU.

2.5. Interview Process & Analysis

All interviews took place over Zoom (video or audio)²⁰ and all were recorded. Each interview began by me reviewing consent (in addition to the consent form, Appendix C, that participants had emailed me in advance), explaining how I came into the project (as I mention above), goals for the research findings dissemination (see below), and reassuring that participants could ask me any questions throughout. Before asking the first interview “question” to participants, I emphasized that that the project was structured to be flexible- and in no way did the respondent have to answer specifically to the question that was being asked (see Appendix A for list of questions I

²⁰ Originally I planned to have in person interviews, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, the ORE required interviews to be done by distance. Overall this shift was fine, with a few technical glitches (i.e. internet freezing) and occasionally the challenge of ensuring I could have private space in my house for confidentiality purposes.

loosely followed); they could share thoughts in whatever direction felt right to them. The interviews on average were one hour each, the shortest being 25 minutes, the longest being 2 hours.

After transcribing the interviews, I imputed the data into Nvivo software to annotate²¹ and code. Interview data was coded under four main themes/categories: culture of the BCGEU (as it pertained to LGBTQ2S+ advocacy), Queer Involvement/Experiences within the BCGEU, Tools of Advocacy by the BCGEU, and Suggestions for LGBTQ2S+ Advocacy at the BCGEU. Within each main code was a number of sub-codes, many of which overlapped with the codes used for the literature I reviewed (also using NVivo). At the beginning of the coding process I anticipated safety/danger to be a predominant theme, however, it was not mentioned as often as I was anticipating and therefore it was eliminated as a central code. On the other hand, I was not anticipating frequent mention of “a sense of belonging and fitting in” being brought up in terms of a form of *advocacy* within the union, so this was a code that I added after transcribing the data.

As I listened to the recordings of the interviews, I heard a full spectrum of emotions come up for participants, including nervousness, awkwardness, frustration, humour, honesty. Labour researchers Stinson and Richmond (1993) discuss a phenomenon of hesitancy, trepidation, and “self-censorship” that can occur when asking union members to critique the movement in any way, which they account as a fear of backlash or contributing to already abundant anti-union sentiment in late capitalist, neoliberal landscapes (p.139). Further, Pascoe et al. (2020) suggest that self-censoring, particularly for marginalized positionalities, is a form of self preservation and often a symptom of one living through precarious realities. With these histories of precarity and marginality in mind, I was cognisant of navigating the fine line between wanting to gather data to help serve LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within unions, while keeping in mind my commitment to a queer methodology that recognizes inherent power relations between researchers and participants (Browne & Nash, 2010). While this navigation is slippery, messy, and constantly changing, I did my best to navigate it by seeking ongoing

²¹ I loosely took notes as I listened to interview recordings, noting overlaps or thoughts I had as they came up. These notes were quite informal but helpful in referencing for the more rigorous coding process.

consent²² throughout the interview process by asking participants how they were feeling, and reminding them at the beginning and end of the interview that they could redact or change anything they shared in our conversation.

In the interviews, I certainly sensed some trepidation with a few participants, particularly from the union leader I spoke to, who asked a few times for their response to go “off record” or be adapted to ensure their identity was protected. Another participant reminded me many times that the union was her “family”, particularly after she said anything remotely critical about the BCGEU. This signified to me the complicatedness of people’s relationship to the union: like family, there’s good and bad times. It can be hard to speak poorly about your loved ones, even when you’re disappointed or hurt. I was honoured to hear such vulnerability and honesty within the interviews.

I felt an intimacy form throughout the hour I spent on Zoom with participants. Listening to the interviews I was reminiscent of Butler (2004) who reminds us, “Let’s face it, we’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something” (p.19). I found myself connecting to this project in a way that I could not have anticipated. These participants had volunteered time and wisdom to me, and that investment was felt on both sides of the conversation (Nowak & Haynes, 2019).

In acknowledging the gift of receiving stories of pain and connection with the union and being trusted to take them into my own words and ultimately “research findings”, I became more connected and committed to the queer methodology, and thereby personally connecting and becoming invested in²³ the many people involved in informing the findings of this project. Contributors to this project deserved attention, care, and recognition of how much I benefited from this research process, not only as I gained my Masters degree but also to be seen as an “expert” on their lived realities. Maintaining

²² Part of the reason I had originally planned to conduct interviews for the project in person was to not only to assess participants enthusiastic consent through verbal cues, but also through body language. About half of the interviews were done with video (the other half being just audio), which helped for checking in with body language, but the video method still was challenging for perceiving these subtle cues.

²³ This investment includes ensuring dissemination of these findings within the Canadian labour movement- both to those who contributed, and to the leaderships that continue to push for LGBTQ2S+ advocacies that are ineffective.

this attention and intention throughout the project was my way of queering research and embodying a queer methodology (Browne & Nash, 2010).

Chapter 3.

Literature Review

In this section, I explore the bodies of literature that speak to how the Canadian labour movement takes up LGBTQ2S+ worker advocacy. At this intersection, I explore: (1) how social unionism as a structural framework is considered within the Canadian labour movement and (2) how using a queer theory lens to look at LGBTQ2S+ advocacy in a union context could strengthen advocacy. In bringing these frameworks together, I establish a theoretical framework that seeks to understand how accessibility and power structures are considered within both bodies of literatures. I conclude by exploring examples of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the Canadian labour movement. I use these examples to show how social unionism and queer theory can come together in practice, and ultimately consider what a *queerer* labour movement could look like.

3.1. Social Unionism

Within the discipline of labour and union studies, the concept of social unionism has taken a number of notable turns. In 1993, Stinson and Richmond defined social unionism as the recognition “that union members lives are not limited to their paid jobs alone” (Stinson & Richmond, 1993, p.50). Social unionism contrasts with business unionism, which emphasizes a more traditional, top-down approach from unions, and emphasizes the role of expert leadership action on behalf of and in the place of members (Ross, 2007). As the union movement began losing popularity and density in the mid 1980’s, unionists started to use the term “union renewal” and “social unionism” to examine where the union movement was failing to resonate with people. Stinson and Richmond (1993) point out that it was actually feminists within the union movement who propelled the theory of social unionism, pushing unions to invest in advocating for issues impacting the membership’s marginalized workers.

More recently, Ross (2007) notes: “nowadays, it seems no self-respecting labour activist wants to be seen as a ‘business unionist’” (p.16). In other words, there’s a sense in the Canadian labour movement that the social unionist philosophy is morally superior as it values social justice concerns and equity. Ross (2007) notes that despite social

unionism being a bit of a buzz term within the labour movement, it's a fluid concept that operates most effectively when seen as a framework. Further, while social unionism has a history of being held in opposition to business unionism, Ross (2007) suggests that dichotomizing these frameworks is unhelpful and inaccurate, as unions often embody a hybrid of the two models. Most importantly, analysis of these models should be focused on the relationship between a union's goals for advocacy and tactics they employ to achieve them.

In their research on unions in the US, Tiffe (2013) looked at gaps in the current literature on "social unionism", noting "social movement unionism, as it's currently being written about and discussed in labo[u]r circles, offers a promising, but not revolutionary, means of addressing social injustice" (p. 168). Thus their research focus' on the "ways in which the labo[u]r movement demonstrates examples of intersectional consciousness and moments of radical position for challenging oppressive power relations" (p.167). Explicitly including intersectionality and power relations within the union when evaluating advocacy for marginalized members was something I borrowed from Tiffe (2013) in establishing the framework for this project.

Ross (2007) developed some key criteria to gauge whether a union has made a "philosophical commitment to social justice" (p.17). Part of this assessment queries what falls within the scope of "social unionism". First: how does the union frame who is entitled to the benefits of solidarity, and does the union advocate for workers *outside* membership? Second, what are the repertoires of strategies for ethical union activity? For example: does the union engage in non-partisan lobbying, or is the union engaged in community/non-union events? I would add to this point, to ask who *within the union* is encouraged to be involved with community outreach²⁴? Finally, Ross (2007) asks: what are the internal organizing practices within the union, and what is the unions approach to who gets to make decisions and have hold power within?

Although these tools for interrogating the "philosophical commitments" a union has to social unionism are helpful, and they guided my thinking as I developed interview

²⁴ For example: do support staff/temp workers within the union get the opportunity to engage in these activities as with union representatives or elected leaders? If not, what does this differentiation say about the kinds of labour the union internally values?

questions to use with BCGEU²⁵ members, staff, and leaders, measuring social unionist qualities within the BCGEU was not my goal. Rather than asking respondents to pigeonhole their experiences within a strict social unionism framework, I approached social unionism as one of many concepts to analyze when gathering stories, experiences, and perspectives from the BCGEU concerning LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the union.

Furthermore, Ross (2007) agrees that drawing definitive conclusions on what counts as “in” or “out” as social unionist practices is not only unhelpful, it may not even be possible given the lack of research in this area. Rather, Ross (2007) suggests that research such as this project needs to “probe how class, gender, racialized, and national identities are embedded in social unionis[m]...and assess the implications for who is mobilized and how” (p.23).

Therefore, in exploring how social unionism is “embedded” in the BCGEU, specifically through the ways LGBTQ2S+ advocacy is taken up, that I begin to interrogate how the BCGEU is or could be *queered*.

3.2. Queer Theory

As Tiffe builds on the gaps of “social unionist” theory to develop a more radical, intersectional approach, I utilize queer theory for the same ends. My aim is to better clarify how the features of a social union framework discussed above can help understand LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the union. This requires an exploration into which queers are or are not currently included in the advocacy efforts within the BCGEU. Within the diverse community that is the LGBTQ2S+ umbrella, whose needs are being imagined and served? To that end, I draw heavily from one concept critical to queer and trans theory – homonormativity – and investigate in particular what homonormativity means within the labour movement. Duggan (2004) describes homonormativity as: “a

²⁵ Nowhere on their website nor in conversations with leadership did I encounter the BCGEU explicitly identifying with the framework of social unionism, however, an abundance of their promotional materials allude to tenets of social unionism (such as commitment to community outreach and advocacy for marginalized members). Thus, I chose social unionism as a framework to assess LGBTQ2S+ advocacy work within the BCGEU as I noted a lot of overlap between Ross’ (2007) notion of social union commitments and the language used by the BCGEU.

politic that upholds and maintains heteronormative policies and institutions through assimilation, rather than challenging or resisting them” (p.19). In a union context, homonormativity is evident in the overemphasis of performative, legal, or economic advocacy, and an avoidance of interrogating the structural causes of why marginalized members and staff feel disempowered in the Canadian labour movement.

Labour and trans activist Salah (2014) calls out a history of exclusionary attempts at LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the Canadian labour movement. They note: “[Canadian unions]...have found it convenient to redeploy muscular and heteronormative as well as homonormative strategies to contend with internal difference, cutting back on social union commitments to solidarity with precarious, youthful, racialized, feminized, and criminalized workers²⁶” (p.162). Here Salah (2014) highlights the performative and unhelpful advocacy approach they’ve witnessed as an active in the Canadian labour movement. Further, they note the importance of undoing a notion of a cohesive history or experience of LGBTQ2S+ workers within the labour movement: each of the adjectives they use to describe the workforce illustrates the broadly diverse membership that may not easily cohere under the LGBTQ2S+ umbrella. Thus, Salah (2014) promotes an LGBTQ2S+ advocacy that accounts for diversities, intersectionality, and positionality.

Valentine (2007) and Greene (2019) also speak to the need “space make” and understand a broad set of perspectives when we interrogate LGBTQ2S+ oppression, and notes the importance of identifying the ways white, cisgender-centred narratives have had power within the queer community (such as the ways the 1969 Stonewall Riots were cast in the media) (Greene, 2019. p.23).

A notable example of a homonormative approach to LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the labour movement is one of the first and only audits on the Canadian labour movement and LGBT issues by Hunt & Eaton (2004): *We Are Family: Labour Responds to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Workers*. The authors highlight “collective bargaining for better wages, benefits, and working conditions is the nucleus of union activity” and emphasize the importance of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the union. In

²⁶ Here Salah (2014) directly alludes to the inherently trans/homophobic nature of the Canadian labour movement’s (specifically the CLC) apathy in their refusal to advocate for decriminalization of and union organizing in sex work. While I do not elaborate further on this issue in this paper, it is an important part of a larger consideration of (the lack of) LGBTQ2S+ advocacy in the Canadian labour movement.

particular, Hunt & Eaton (2004) focus on advocacy that is centered around written and legal recourse via collective agreement language and arbitration wins for LGBTQ2S+ workers (p.137). While this piece of written and legal advocacy is certainly a part of the puzzle, as Tiffe (2013) suggests, it does not address the systemic power imbalances within union culture and nuanced, diverse, intersectional understandings of what LGBTQ2S+ workers need. Similarly, Salah (2014) brings into question the utility of written and legal recourse as a primary method of advocacy. They write, “these motions [get] passed on paper, but how were they brought to the attention to the representatives expected to report back to their local? What systems of accountability are in place to ensure these motions are understood and implemented?” (p.159). Salah (2014) points out that unions lack a mechanism of regulating written advocacy tools, such as motions, which suggests that not only are these tools performative and ineffective, they may not even be implemented.

A similar concern related to hetero/homonormativity within LGBTQ2S+ advocacy and the labour movement is what might be described as an obsession with two highly visible issues: legalizing same-sex marriage and involvement in Pride parades. In their autobiographical article *Confronting Limits, Pushing Boundaries: LGBTQ Education and Activism*, Smith (2019) writes that the “primary success” of the LGBTQ committee she was involved with was “the fight for spousal benefits and same-sex marriages” and secondly “push[ing] the labour movement to be much more supportive of Pride issues in general and to participate in Pride parades” (p.37-39). Tiffe (2013) had a similar finding, noting “marriage equality has become first priority on the mainstream gay rights agenda, and big labo[u]r continues to make public coalitional strides towards this effort” (p.4). However, Tiffe (2013) further expands to note the harm caused by the exclusive focus on concerns such as legal recourse, marriage equality, and Pride involvement as they “distract the movement and the public from concerns that impact the most marginalized members of the LGBT community” (p. 5). Tiffe (2013) argues that while unions prioritize these items in the gay rights agenda they are “consistently prioritiz[ing] the most privileged while fucking over everyone else” given that “poor and working class people would not benefit economically from marriage²⁷” (p.5). A similar critique could be made about Pride and most collective agreement protections- which are centred on supporting

²⁷ For example- marriage can result in working/poor people to no longer have eligibility for social funding and/or monetary benefits from the government (Tiffe, 2013).

those who already occupy privilege, and these tactics do not address systemic change within the labour movement (such as decentralizing leadership power and prioritizing marginalized voices).

Tiffe (2013) suggests that beyond these hetero/homonormative advocacy practices lies an important opportunity challenge the systems that reduce subjects (workers) to a number of binaries (male/female, married/single, heterosexual/homosexual, natural/perverse). Tiffe (2013) notes that in fact the labo[u]r movement has an opportunity to not only advocate for queers, but also capture intersections of diversity and marginality within LGBTQ2S+ workers. Further, Tiffe (2013) suggests that through institutional and political disruption (such as pushing for a shift away from centralized leadership power within unions) the Canadian labour movement can itself become *queered*.

Noting how privilege shapes literatures, understandings of history, and visions for the future of the Canadian labour movement and LGBTQ2S+ advocacy is part of what I hope to accomplish by bringing queer theory into the critical framework of this project.

3.3. Queering Social Unionism

Identifying who has access to solidarity within the union, even within a scope of access to LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, is an incredibly important and complex question. Fraser (2005) argues that the framing of a union, be it through the lens of social unionism, business unionism, or otherwise “is among the most consequential of political decisions since it not only constitutes members of and non-members of a particular community, but also defines who is entitled to consideration, to solidarity, to rights” (quoted in Ross, 2007, p.19). In other words: a unions approach to advocacy is directly aligned to their framing, and how this approach (as administered by leadership, in the case of most large unions such as the BCGEU) manifests can have significant material impacts. For example, the union must actively *work* to be inclusive for marginalized workers- accessing union solidarity does not come inherently.

On the one hand, Ross (2007) suggests that a social unionism frame extends beyond the “traditional, bureaucratic and top-down” approach to leadership and decision-making. Therefore the social unionist framework should be accessible for

members to become involved in a meaningful way in accessing power and decision-making within the union. The question of access to decision-making power is particularly relevant in this project with regard to how decisions around LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BCGEU are made.

On the other hand, queer theory demands that we ask directly: who exactly is included in LGBTQ2S+ advocacy strategies? Who is centred in these efforts and who is made marginal in implicit or explicit ways? What is lost for those not at the centre of the movement? Salah (2014) adds to this question, asking “when is inclusion coercive, colonizing even? When does our desire for recognition, to recognize ourselves in others, to be in solidarity, to rescue ourselves in others, misfire, and to what ends?” (p.150). These questions offer an important starting place for those engaging in and driving advocacy or ally work, and operate as a good reminder that advocacy should not be a projection of one's own needs or worries. Further, Salah's (2014) questions are a helpful lens for this project as I explore the experiences and perspectives of members, staff, and leaders within the BCGEU on their understandings of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the organization.

Salah also articulates the ways in which advocacy appears to be performative as opposed to truly working in solidarity with affected communities. Describing what a performative guise of “solidarity” looked like for them in their experiences in the labour movement, Salah (2014) discusses how acknowledging positionality and marginality is essential to advocacy and thereby solidarity. They suggest that there are “limits inherent to a politic that underst[ands] trans workers as members of a sexual minority, analogous to lesbian and gay workers and in need of similar protections and supports.” (p.150). However, though they are comparable, the advocacy work for each sexual minority is not the same. Lumping all “LGBTQ2S+” people together in a single advocacy approach lacks consideration of the individual contexts, positionalities, and intersectionalities of each individual (Rubin, 2015). To advocate for the trans community is not the same work as advocating for the gay and lesbian community, the Two Spirit community, the queer-BIPOC community, etc. Leadership needs to open itself to the feedback given by individual members, so no one gets left behind.

Salah (2014) links the ways accessibility and power intersect in union LGBTQ2S+ advocacy through a critique of Hunt & Eaton's (2007) perception of GLB²⁸ advocates within the labour movement "gaining traction". They note that Hunt & Eaton (2007)

...describe the process of trans advocacy in the union context as proceeding less through grassroots mobilization among the membership than through a process whereby trans activists and GLB allies got the ear of leadership and then secured equity commitments that were operationalized in top-down fashion. [Hunt & Eaton] make the argument that transgender activists' gains have been dependent upon and benefited from foundations laid, and networks established, by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and feminist activism (Salah, 2014, p.159).

While Hunt and Eaton (2007) may be correct that trans advocates have had to "depend" on the privilege of GLB and feminist labour activists to be recognized at all within the labour movement, the next step is for unions to trust the trans members mobilizing at the grassroots level.

3.4. Strength in a Queerer Labour Movement

In looking to the literature for examples of the North American²⁹ labour movement and LGBTQ2S+ advocacy collaborating, the importance of coalition-building and mutual benefit between movements came up a lot (Ángeles et al., 2020; Sweeny, 2001; Tiffe, 2013; Tattersall, 2010; Vaid 2001). Writers agree that there is an evolving³⁰ need for the unions and LGBTQ2S+ workers to establish a healthy coalition. What this coalition would look like is an open question. Workplace research think-tank Catalyst found that in 2018, approximately 47 per cent of LGBTQ2S+ workers have experienced workplace harassment or violence, while research by Pride at Work (2016) found that roughly one-

²⁸ Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual.

²⁹ Although the focus of this thesis is on the Canadian labour movement, the literature is largely looking exclusively at the American labour movement or transnationally between both the Canadian and American labour movement(s).

³⁰ While the older literature was heavily focused on gay, lesbian, and bisexual advocacy and coalition building within the labour movement, newer literature has addressed the need for more coalition building specifically between trans workers, queer BIPOC workers and queer workers with disabilities and the labour movement.

third of research respondents don't find their workplace safe for LGBTQ2S+ workers. Addressing these concerns would be an obvious starting point for such a coalition.

According to Amanda Tattersall's (2010) research *Power in Coalition: Strategies for strong unions and social change*, "coalitions have the potential to be not simply a tool for advancing union goals, but, more than that, a means of achieving a new kinds of social change that could also contribute to the reinvention of unions" (p.2). Even the 2014 film *Pride*, based on the story of the 1984 Welsh National Union of Mineworkers strike and the advent of "Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM)", demonstrates the strength of collaboration, coalition-building, and the potential for a queerer movement. The film fictionalizes the true story of the relationship between the striking miners and the newly visible lesbian and gay movement in London, UK. In the face of aggressive attacks from neoliberal Margaret Thatcher, the film captures the generative potential for both movements to gain energy in the resistance through decentring the individual movements' focus and expanding strength between both communities, together. "You need the miners to stay employed so we can have heat at the gay dances" says Mark, the leader of LGSGM in *Pride* (2014). In other words, queer advocacy is worker advocacy.

For the Canadian labour movement, union density has been on a rapid decline since the 1980's. Historian Christo Aivalis (2018) goes so far as to say, given the threat of late stage capitalism and neoliberalism, if unions continue to deteriorate, our democracy may well be at stake. A queerer labour movement can address these challenges. Urvashi Vaid (2001) argues that queering the labour movement can actually be an organizing strategy. They suggest that while some coalitions "evaporate when the common goal is achieved or lost" and alliances "imply a tactical expediency", approaching coalition-building with intersectionality in mind can spark positive change (in this case, for the Canadian labour movement) that makes "connections between issues, the private and the public, the racial and the gendered" (p. 239). In other words, sustainability and the framework of building a queerer labour movement is not only possible, it is crucial.

3.5. Closing Thoughts

By exploring social unionism and the critical lens offered by queer theory, I establish a critical framework that interrogates who is entitled to solidarity in the union, and questions accessibility within union structure. I argue that by integrating elements from a social union frame, as well as elements from queer theory, both movements can benefit from a collaborative queering of the Canadian labour movement.

Chapter 4.

Case Study: Structure of the BCGEU

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explains whom the BCGEU represents and how the union understands their own structure to operate. Outlining these organizational features will contextualize comments made by participants, showcased in the next chapter, on how LGBTQ2S+ advocacy is taken up. After developing a sense of the history and understanding of the BCGEU system in the broadest sense, I highlight specific advocacy tools, roles, and events utilized by the BCGEU and explain the history and role they play as understood by the BCGEU. These include: The Equity and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) and LGBTQ2S+ round table, shop stewards and collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), and convention.

By unpacking an understanding of the history of the structure of the BCGEU as it pertains to the data findings, I aim to develop a comprehensive overview of both the ways the BCGEU functions in regards to LGBTQ2S+ worker advocacy, and ways these systems could be improved. This section examines materials found on the BCGEU website including: charts and education tools, as well as communications sent from leadership to membership and committees.

4.2. Structure & History of the BCGEU

The BCGEU was founded in the late 1900's as provincial government employees formed an association to address their working conditions³¹. The union now represents

³¹ Around 1919, workers in BC were striking and protesting demanding better wages and working conditions. Public workers earned lower wages than private sector workers and faced unfair hiring practices. As these workers began organizing (for a union that would become the BCGEU), the government was highly uncooperative in recognizing their demands, and the union lost traction. It was not until post World War 2 that BCGEU membership started to gain density, as governments began investing in public infrastructure, despite ongoing struggle for the union members to access rights with the BC government (BCGEU 100, 2019).

over 80,000 members with 550 bargaining units³² in both the private sector and public services³³ (BCGEU, n.d.). These bargaining units also belong to local union branches, and a local may represent workers who are in one or more of these bargaining units³⁴. Locals represent members in specific regions within BC, have their own bylaws, and elect officers (such as chairperson, VP, treasurer, secretary). Locals also elect representatives to the component executive. There are 11 components at BCGEU that combine locals from similar occupational groupings/sectors.

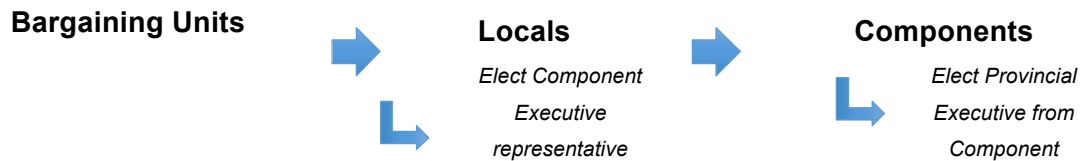


Figure 5. Bargaining Units, Locals, Components

Although I do not have the space to fully explore the inner workings of the system and operations of the BCGEU, my intent is to map out the structures and hierarchies referenced by participants. The chart below (Figure 4.2), taken from the BCGEU website, interestingly depicts the members at the top, and provincial executive at the bottom, despite describing the role of the provincial executive as “govern[ing] the union”. On the other hand, this chart could be read as if it were a theater map- in which the members are the audience and the elected roles are the orchestra/stage. Despite how one understands this visual representation, this chart serves as a reference point in relation to the lived realities of how this system and the advocacies within are experienced by members, staff³⁵, and leadership at the BCGEU.

³² Separate groups that each has unique collective agreements made between the BCGEU and specific employers.

³³ Including provincial government workers and public sector workers such as in health care, community-based social services, and education.

³⁴ For example, I previously was a member of a CUPE local that had both administrative and “research” workers, and therefore we had two different bargaining units even within our very small local.

³⁵ An example of this would be despite promoting the union to be a bottom up democratic organization, internally staff (particularly secretaries) are unable to make any decisions in their without the approval of supervisors. This refers to both minor decisions, such as which font to use in correspondence, and more important matters, such as adopting preferred pronouns or changing problematic wording in letters.

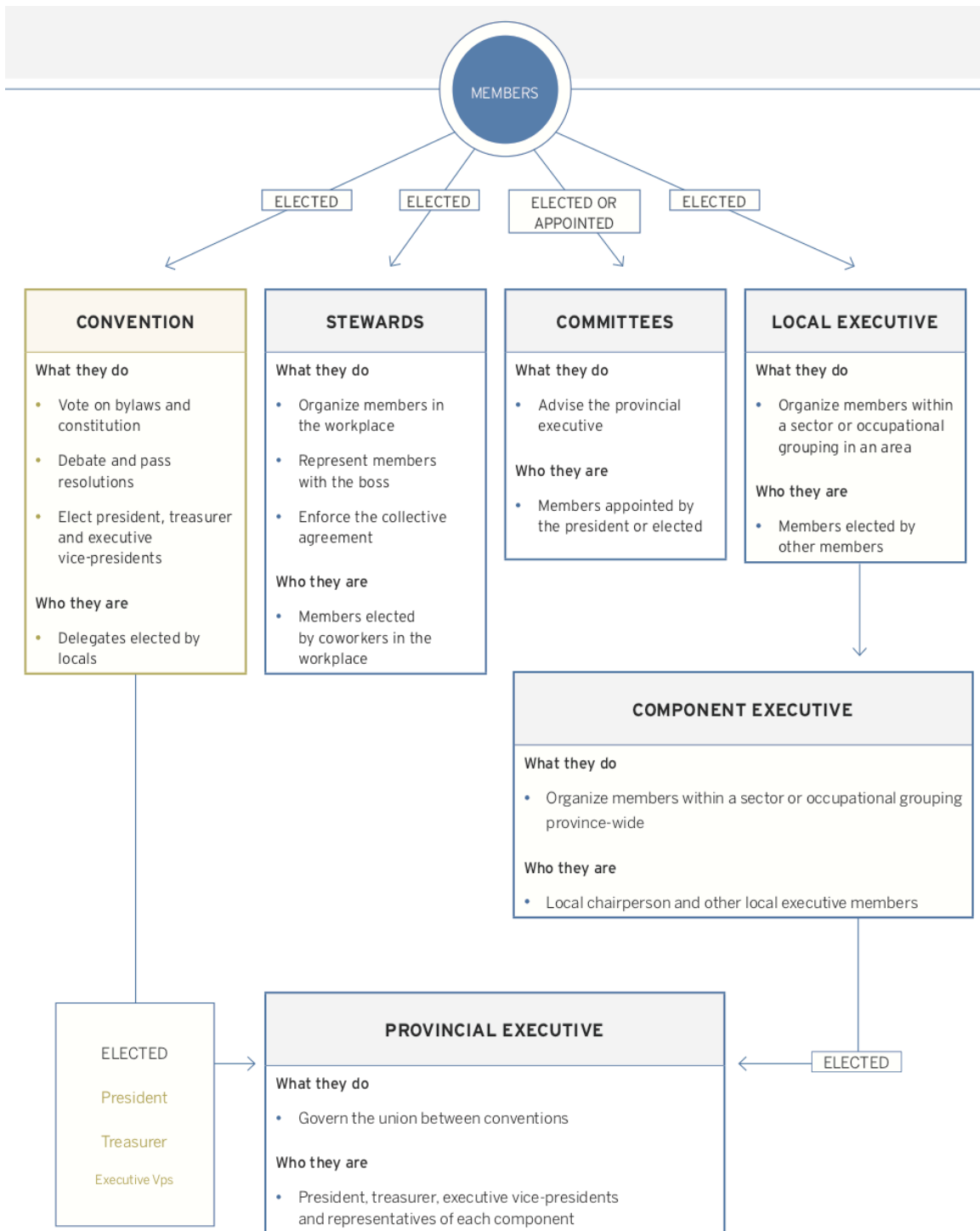


Figure 6. BCGEU Structure
Credit: BCGEU.ca, 2021

4.3. Understanding Tools, Roles, and Events for LGBTQ2S+ Advocacy

4.3.1. Equity & Human Rights Committee

The BCGEU describes the role of the Equity and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) as “provid[ing] policy recommendations to the Provincial Executive, which brings an equity lens to bargaining proposals, member education, coalition work, and a range of events and activities” (BCGEU100, 2019). According to the BCGEU Constitution, “the [E]quity and [H]uman [R]ights [C]ommittee will consist of two members from each designated equity group” including: workers with disabilities, Indigenous workers, workers of colour, and LGBTQ2S+ workers. These members “shall be elected at an Equity & Human Rights Conference” which often happens following the triennial convention. Therefore, the members present to vote are those who identify within a specific caucus³⁶ who also put their name forward to attend the convention.

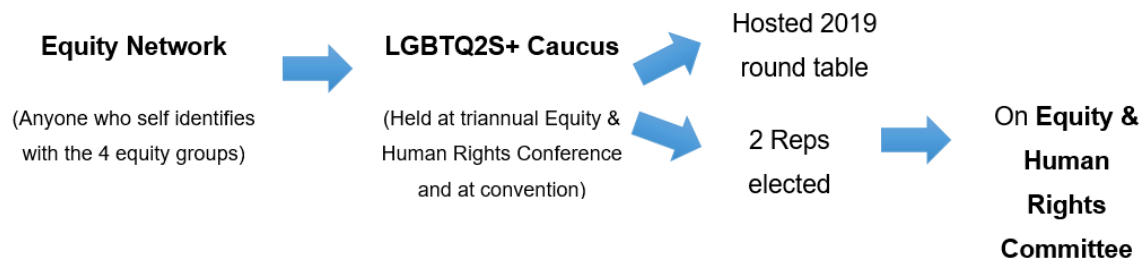


Figure 7. Equity Committee

The creation of equity committees within the Canadian labour movement began roughly in the 1970’s and were an attempt to carve out space within unions to acknowledge and address marginalization and systemic oppression, which continues to be fought for today (BCGEU100, 2019; Rise Up Feminist Archive, 2021). Women’s committees were the first to be acknowledged by the Canadian labour movement, and for many years they fought for various human rights issues and campaigns. In 1993 the BCGEU convention started to broaden the equity committee scope beyond women³⁷,

³⁶ An informal grouping of people who meet to discuss their common interests, including groups of members with common interests at a union conference or convention (CUPE, 2021).

³⁷ Specifically cis gender women, as these women’s committees also hold a volatile history of epistemic violence for who appeared butch, non-conforming, or who identified as trans (Salah, 2013).

establishing the Equity and Human Rights Committee as it exists today, with representatives from the four equity groups listed above (BCGEU100, 2019).

The LGBTQ2S+ Reps of the EHRC and the BCGEU leadership also held the first ever LGBTQ2S+ round table in February 2020, which many of the participants spoke about in the data. The roundtable was generated from a resolution³⁸ at the 2017 BCGEU Convention that was initially intended specifically for the workers with disabilities committee and the Indigenous workers committee. However, leadership felt that the LGBTQ2S+ committee should also be offered a round table event, and approached the Provincial Executive of the BCGEU to approve this event since it was not in the original resolution. Unlike the workers with disabilities and Indigenous workers round table events which were promoted on the BCGEU website, the LGBTQ2S+ round table was only promoted through email to the list of workers who had self identified as LGBTQ2S+ via the BCGEU's Equity Network self-disclosure process³⁹. The email invitation, which was shared with me by an interview participant, was sent to Equity Network members identifying as LGBTQ2S+. It read:

“[the roundtable] will be a chance to be a part of conversations about how we make our workplaces, union, and communities more inclusive. If you are an LGBTQ2S+ worker and are interested in participating in this final roundtable gathering, click here to complete an expression of interest. This roundtable will be a small, interactive dialogue between workers from across the province. Your experience and wisdom will help share recommendations to our union on collective agreement language in making positive changes in the workplace, public policy advocacy as well as union internal policies for inclusion...Together we can help shape an action plan for the union to identify and respond to discrimination,

³⁸ Resolutions are generated, voted upon, and submitted at the local level to convention and may ask the union to take a position on an important issue, implement a new policy, and/or change the constitution or structure of the BCGEU. Resolutions are voted on by attendees at the convention and must pass with a straight majority.

³⁹ On the BCGEU website, under the banner BCGEU Equity & Human Rights Committee members are asked: “Are you a member of the BCGEU Equity Network yet? The BCGEU is committed to ensuring that our activities and events are accessible to our membership from all equity-seeking groups, and to connecting with and supporting our diverse membership. BCGEU members who identify with one or more of the four equity groups have joined the BCGEU Equity Network, and we encourage you to sign up! The Equity Network groups are: Aboriginal, Workers with Disabilities (this includes any hidden disability), Workers of Colour, Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender. Signing up to the Equity Network puts you on a confidential mailing list and you receive information, news stories, and invitations to BCGEU- sponsored events.” (BCGEU, 2017).

homophobia, transphobia, and other barriers to full participation in our communities” (BCGEU, n.d.).

The round table was held for three days and LGBTQ2S+ members from all over British Columbia were encouraged to attend.

4.3.2. Shop Stewards, Grievances, & Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs)

According to the BCGEU, “shop stewards are the backbone of [the] union. They are volunteers, and anyone at [the] worksite that is a member of the union in good standing is eligible to be elected as a shop steward” (n.d.). Stewards⁴⁰ represent workers at the worksite and intervene when a member is “being treated unfairly” (BCGEU, n.d.). Stewards are also “responsible for making sure the collective agreement is enforced at the worksite” and can file a grievance⁴¹ for a member (BCGEU, n.d.).

When talking about the significance of stewards in advocacy work at the BCGEU, a few members talked about the grievance process, wherein members can “file a grievance” with their steward, when matters of the CBA or other protected grounds under labour or human rights⁴² laws have been violated. In the interviews, a participant noted: “if there was a human rights violation, [the shop steward would file] a grievance” (Pickles Interview, 2020). Another participant described this advocacy process as “recourse”. She emphasized that this form of advocacy utilizing the CBA and the role of the steward is critical for LGBTQ2S+ members and notes her skepticism in the employers “word”:

Because the union has things down in writing, we have recourse. If we didn't have recourse, would [employers] really be that accountable? I don't know. Workplaces say they would be, but would they really? (Rosechild Interview)

⁴⁰ Steward and shop steward are terms used interchangeably.

⁴¹ A grievance can be understood as differences between the employer and union respecting the interpretation, application, operation, or any alleged violation of the collective agreement, including discipline, dismissal, or suspension of an employee bound by the CBA (BCGEU, 2019).

⁴² I do not have the space to exhaustively explore the relationship members have to legal protections- including within the BCGEU CBA. Members also have the right to access federal, and international legal protections.

This notion of written protection through collective bargaining agreements for vulnerable workers has been greatly promoted through literature and pop culture as one of the strengths of unions, both historically and currently (Ross, 2015). Hunt and Eaton's (2007) article on LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within Canadian unions does a cross analysis of CBA language for LGBTQ2S+ protections within the Canadian labour movement, as a reference point to establish best practice and model language for LGBTQ2S+ protections. Further, they argue that "collective bargaining for better wages, benefits, and working conditions is the nucleus of union activity" (p.137). The recent study by UCLA⁴³ with UFCW⁴⁴, *Union Values and LGBTQ+ Worker Experiences: A Survey of UFCW Workers in the United States and Canada* (2020), showed that "CBAs are one of the key tools at the union's disposal to improve workplace conditions and increase equity for marginalized workers" (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.26).

4.3.3. Convention

According to the BCGEU constitution (2015), the provincial executive and triennial constitutional convention are the governing bodies of the union. This means that the provincial executive governs between each convention and follows the union's constitution and bylaws. At convention, members "elect the president, treasurer, and the four executive vice-presidents and determine what the mandate of the union will be over the next three years" (BCGEU News, n.d.). Delegates present at convention, who are elected by their locals to attend as representatives, elect these leadership roles. Further, "each component shall be allowed to elect two equity delegates" to attend convention (BCGEU Constitution and Bylaws, 2015). I don't have the space to exhaustively explore the histories and significance of the on-going fight to expand and prioritize these equity seats for conventions across the Canadian labour movement. However, I make note of it to draw attention to the challenges of navigating the hierarchy that is built into the BCGEU and many unions like it. The very fact that equity seats must be fought for and specified speaks to the lack of diversity built into the union's commitments and structure.

Another essential role of convention is the submission and passing of resolutions. Resolutions are created in advance of convention and approved by the

⁴³ The University of California, Los Angeles.

⁴⁴ The United Food & Commercial Workers.

component. At convention, a resolution passes with a majority vote of the delegates present and voting. According to BCGEU Local 604, resolutions “may ask that the union take a position on an important issue, implement a new policy or change the constitution or structure of the BCGEU” (BCGEU News, n.d.). I do not have the space to give a full overview of the resolutions that have come to and/or been passed at the BCGEU convention concerning LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. That said- tracking resolution utility over time concerning equity matters within the union would certainly be worthy of further research.

Next I present the data findings for this project, centred on stories from BCGEU members, staff, and leadership. The histories, structures, and practices of the BCGEU discussed in the section above operate to contextualize the data that follows, as a number of participants not only allude to the structural impacts of their understandings of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the union, but actually criticize the structure and call for changes to it.

Chapter 5.

Data Findings

5.1. Introduction

From the beginning of this project I knew I wanted to explore the overlap and gaps between human rights advocacy, namely LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, and the Canadian labour movement. However as I got further into preliminary research I decided to conduct a case study and speak with members, staff, and elected leaders at the BCGEU. It became apparent to me that understanding the structure of the union is both important for understanding how LGBTQ2S+ advocacy at the BCGEU is perceived, and an important step in moving towards generative thinking on how to improve methods of advocacy within the union. Furthermore, nearly all participants in the project spoke about the BCGEU's structure concerning leadership, hierarchy, power, and/or systemic barriers within in consideration of LGBTQ2S+ worker advocacy.

In this chapter, I draw upon my conceptual framework of social unionism – who is entitled to consideration, solidarity, and rights? (Ross, 2007) – and queer theory – which “queers” the structures and advocacy tools are working for, and who is left out? – to consider member understandings and experiences of LGBTQ2S+ activism within BCGEU. I use this lens to examine interviewees’ reflections on BCGEU’s structure and advocacy systems and tie this back to questions about social unionism, homonormativity within the Canadian labour movement, and queering advocacy.

This chapter begins by exploring the ways electoral systems can create barriers for involvement and advocacy for certain members at the BCGEU. Next, I explore: the Equity and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) and the LGBTQ2S+ roundtable, shop stewards and collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), and convention (including perceptions of leadership and the BCGEU as an employer). For each of these sections I draw out the ways the data illuminates these elements and advocacy strategies to be experienced in practice.

I then explore specific themes from the data relating to experiences of participants within the BCGEU pertaining to LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. First I investigate the

impact of being “out” and tensions within “community” at the BCGEU as discussed by participants. I discuss the ways Pride as a means of advocacy were mentioned, and the limitations of this as a focal point of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. Lastly, I explore the ways the data demonstrated a need for the BCGEU to influence LGBTQ2S+ advocacy *beyond* the scope of the union, and how this fits into a social unionism model.

5.2. Accessibility of the BCGEU Structure

In analysing the data, I realized the concepts of power and hierarchy reoccurred across a number of interviews. The most obvious place these concepts became visible was in comments related to the structure of BCGEU and how members participated.

The overall structure of the BCGEU, like many unions, is complex to navigate and understand; this is the case for many members and non-union folk alike. Bash (she/her), a queer shop steward and member of the BCGEU, summarized this shared feeling of the BCGEU’s structural inaccessibility:

I think the union structure can sometimes be overwhelming and seen as impenetrable for new people. I think I was a steward for three years before I felt I knew anything. (Bash)

Leaders shared this sentiment. For those who had navigated the hierarchy effectively enough to find themselves in leadership roles, this is a notable observation. I spoke to Donna (she/her), who had been involved with the union for about a decade before becoming elected into a leadership role. She identified the importance of relationship-building within the union, and emphasized that a well-functioning structure for advocacy is not unilateral, it’s a two-way relationship. Her comments highlight a disconnect between those in power within the BCGEU and those members falling through the cracks, resulting in a dysfunction of democracy within the union.

If we’re looking at changes around 2SLGBTQ+ issues and having those be a priority, it comes back to [this]: how do members who are 2SLGBTQ+ build power and understanding in the union, and how is the union facilitating awareness and networks of support?... I think we forget democracy is relationships. (Donna)

These comments raise questions and concerns about a way forward within this system in a way that considers the involvement – and impediments to involvement – of marginalized (namely LGBTQ2S+) members. Further, Donna noted a lack of union

education to help LGBTQ2S+ members better understand *how* to penetrate the system. As well, she highlighted a lack of effort made by the union to show membership that the BCGEU is working towards advocating for LGBTQ2S+ worker rights.

Bash and Donna's comments on the deficiency of education surrounding how unions work in the most general sense suggest that there is a link between the fact that only a small handful of people manage to access positions of power, and overwhelmingly these leadership roles are not occupied by people who are in marginalized positions. This issue causes not only a disconnect to accessing democracy, as Donna suggested above, but also a lack of union density⁴⁵ as fewer people understand how to get involved. Pickles (he/him), who is quoted in more detail below, noted that marginalized members may not feel safe to try to do so.

(In)accessibility of the structure of the BCGEU was also brought up by members who expressed frustrations of gatekeeping with use of certain academic jargon. Bash elaborated on these frustrations, in which she tied inaccessibility of BCGEU's structure to academic posturing:

What I struggle with often, especially with the upper echelon...is that BCGEU has a large component (and this is no dis on you) of highly educated people. I come from a very poor background and...I fucking hate jargon. The jargon that people use in the upper echelon is so alienating. (Bash)

Bash demonstrated the shape that inaccessibility takes: jargon forms a distinct barrier for her as a working class queer member and participant. Further, her use of the term "upper echelon" rather than "leadership" draws attention to the hierarchical division felt by the membership.

Thinking back to how the BCGEU perceives its structure and hierarchy as depicted in Figure 1.2, the union frames the relationship between members and leaders by suggesting that members are at the "top" of the organization. Yet, there is a disconnect between the union's self-perception and the experience of how the structure works in practice. The effect of this gap is that already marginalized members experience precarity within their own union; likewise, there is a broader disconnect

⁴⁵ Union density refers to the numbers of workers who are members of a union.

between what the union promotes versus what it is achieving. Further, participant responses illuminate the messiness of landing on a concise “answer” about how to do advocacy, as the perspectives on how advocacy is best achieved is intimately tied to personal experience and positionality.

5.2.1. Being Elected

As participants discussed barriers to meaningful involvement and visibility within the BCGEU and LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, it became apparent that to be heard within the BCGEU, one must become *elected* in one way or another. On the one hand, elected positions require and facilitate democratic process and involvement of general membership. However, at closer look, to even get to convention (the event in which the union’s bylaws, constitution, resolutions, and leadership are decided), members must be elected by their locals. To become elected, a member must be able to be present at most meetings and be perceived as a leader/representative. In other words, these are the preconditions to even participate in decision-making at any scale of the union.

Given the systemic barriers faced by marginalized people- such as working multiple jobs, single parenting, juggling impacts of racism, transphobia, homophobia, and/or ableism- it becomes apparent that so-called democratic participation in these elections is a system accessible to some more than others. Strauss and Meehan (2013) note that the “unequal distribution of conditions of flourishing ... render some bodies, some workforces, and some communities far more precarious than others.”(p.2). For many marginalized people, including LGBTQ2S+ members, participatory democracy implies the assumption of time, confidence in one’s own capacity, and a sense of safety and belonging.

Pickles (he/him), a shop steward and 15 year member who also serves on the BCGEU Equity and Human Rights Committee (EHRC), made this clear. He denoted the subtle barriers that emerge when marginalized members navigate the hierarchy at the BCGEU:

If you’re out, confident, vocal, and have things to bring to the table... then [the BCGEU] is a safe space for you. (Pickles)

Pickles' comments show that there are certain qualities, traits, and ways of being LGBTQ2S+ that the union values in order to even access *safety* within the union, let alone succeed in its democratic systems. The structure requires a certain level of privilege and status to penetrate, and subsequently become involved in its "democratic" procedures. Pickles followed these remarks about who is privileged within the system of the BCGEU by noting that his privileges also give him *protection* within the system. He shared: "...I'm protected by my skin and gender, so yeah, I was pretty confident [in union settings]" (Pickles Interview, 2020). By linking barriers to union involvement and protection, Pickles draws out an important concern for the places that marginalized members may slip through the cracks and not have an active role in shaping the union.

While hierarchy, electability, and a difficult-to-navigate structure pose a certain set of problems, it's also important to recognize the efforts made within the existing structure and advocacy mechanisms. It is to this content that I now turn.

5.3. The EHRC & LGBTQ2S+ Roundtable as Advocacy

Many participants in this project spoke about the BCGEU Equity and Human Rights Committee (EHRC), and many spoke specifically about an event in February 2020 that the LGBTQ2S+ branch of the EHRC put on: the first ever LGBTQ2S+ roundtable held at the BCGEU.

The roundtable received very mixed feedback in respondents' comments, particularly as it related to being a mechanism of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BCGEU. The union intended for this event to inspire positive changes in the workplace, inform collective agreements, and influence public policies and internal union policies. However, the efforts were unevenly received by attendees. Karanveer (he/him), a relatively new member and young worker was really happy to see the engagement and presence of leadership at the roundtable, which he told me was the first BCGEU event he had attended. In fact, the leadership merely attending was indication enough for him that the union was invested in LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. He shared:

The higher ups were present- Stephanie Smith, the president of the BCGEU- she was there on the first day and she spoke. I believe on the

second day Paul Finch⁴⁶, so, these are some pretty prominent names within the BCGEU, so that signalled to me that the people at the top are listening or they at least care about the conference. (Karanveer)

Bash was also encouraged seeing the leadership present, though added that she felt a tension at the event, as attendees expressed frustration at the utility of the event regarding LGBTQ2S+ advocacy.

It was interesting to watch. People were expressing anger over, you know, 'equity is tokenism' etcetera and I'm completely sympathetic, but I also know the long picture of how long that...took to even get... you meet and everyone gets energized at the meeting and you want action right away. We had Paul Finch come in [and speak] and some people felt he was placating us, and I just wanted to go 'no it's really important, this is how things are changed for the union... this is how you bring things up'. (Bash)

Bash speaks directly to the benefits of an event such as the roundtable for navigating advocacy work *alongside* leadership and *within* the structure of the BCGEU after years of witnessing its operation. Further, she seems to be addressing a felt sense of worry that the progress could actually be retracted if suspicion of leadership's involvement were to be pushed too hard. It could also be read that Bash is frustrated at the invisibility of the work it took to gain any equity within the union. Regardless, there seems to be a sense of hope from Bash that there is a utility to the EHRC and events held such as this roundtable as Bash believes "this is how things are changed for the union".

However, all did not express these sentiments of camaraderie, trust, and optimism concerning the leadership and efficacy of the round table and the EHRC. Pickles shared his frustrations, feeling fed up with the performativity of the role of the committee work leading up the roundtable:

The leadership ended up pulling all the stuff together in a rush and then asking for input. They usurped the whole process and made it their process. They gave us speaking notes for our own event so it's like- this isn't even our event, this is your event. So there's a bit of resentment in that. The system is set up that other people are going to speak for you, about you, and not with us... We have voice, but no vote. The leadership come to us for reference but they don't really have to listen to us...it's like someone else is speaking for you. (Pickles)

⁴⁶ The Secretary Vice President of the BCGEU.

In a similar vein of concern, Pickles also passed on a story second-hand from another equity caucus event, the workers of colour round table event at the BCGEU:

At the workers of colour roundtable, the President came in and did a little speech. But [the members] didn't want the leadership there because none of them are Black or racialized. All sorts of people were like 'oh my god how can you not invite the president she's a great ally' but... this was their space, they should determine who comes in. (Pickles)

Both of these quotes illustrate leadership's desire to maintain control over the direction of advocacy within the union. Leadership seem to want to be invested, or demonstrate their investment, in the work of equity committees such as the LGBTQ2S+ caucus. They express this interest by becoming involved with planning and making themselves visible at events. However, Pickles highlighted that beyond a desire for involvement by leadership there was an exertion of power and ultimately a "usurp[ing]" of members' agency. A similarly performative attitude has been noted with regard to trans advocacy. Ahmed (2012) notes: "...institutions really believe in the performative effect of their own pronunciation as trans welcoming- and reject any further interpellation in terms of the material conditions for that welcoming" (as quoted in Boellstorff et al., 2014, p.424). The sentiment of being welcomed by leadership does not necessarily result in marginalized members seeking safe space, support, and advocacy within the union.

The relationship between union leadership and equity committees has a long history. Socialist feminist Cynthia Cockburn reflected on this relationship in her 1984 text, specifically considering the ways women's committees became popularized in the labour movement. Cockburn argues that as women fought for equality within unions, the focus of leadership became women's "difference" and "specificity" as compared to the neutral or normal member or leader (p.45). In other words, women continued to be "the other". At the same time, leadership wanted to appear progressive⁴⁷ (such as through the visible support of equity committees) despite their inefficiencies and lack of listening to the members to which the committee is actually intended to serve. Thus, union leaders advocated for women's equality through the promotion of women-only committees, courses, and conferences. However, Cockburn suggests that in practice,

⁴⁷ The labour movement has a long history of aligning with "left" or "progressive" politics in Canada (Black et al., 2015). Therefore, there's a motivation for labour leadership to be seen as progressive and supporting equity-seeking member needs.

(equity) committees “still leaves [women] marginal to the ostensible business of trade unionism: negotiation and bargaining with the employer. Women’s relationship to power...remains unarticulated” (p.45)

Arguably, this history illustrates that while leadership will provide visible support by creating equity committees, the committees are not especially effective in creating change. Moreover, the lack of listening shown by the BCGEU leadership indicates that indeed the granting of equity committees is not enough, as the power remains with leadership.. These concerns are exemplified in the frustration expressed by Pickles. He questioned the utility of equity committee work and the role leadership plays; his comments point out that the advocacy coming from leadership is performative. Pickles elaborated on his frustration for the lack of meaningful and equitable collaboration between leadership and the equity committee as the round table became organized:

I’m sick of having fucking round tables. [The leadership] are like ‘well you wanted a round table’ and I said [we] wanted a round table where we brought experts in the field of what we’re doing [so] we can take away something we can actually be doing...we talked, we talked about feelings, experiences, it was like a fucking therapy session and it was like what are [we] taking home? Nothing. And people shared some really hard stories saying ‘I need help now’. (Pickles)

Holding a round table event without follow up or implementation of needs and suggestions from attendees who have come to seek support and help from their union is negligent and deeply concerning. Not only do these members pay union dues for this support, there is also an obvious lack of accountability and education on the historical and current trauma workers are experiencing due to their gender and sexual diversity.

There are a number of concerns that emerge where there is an absence of collaboration between leadership and the LGBTQ2S+ members volunteering to bring community and advocacy-focused events to the membership. Most importantly, this approach utilizes top-down power to control grassroots organizing, which is both harmful and ineffective.

5.3.1. Committees & Intersectional Experiences

Another limitation of the current approach to identity specific committees at the BCGEU (and many other unions within Canada) is the lack of recognizing intersectional

identities. At present, members must parse apart their identities in to address marginality within the union. Valentine (2007) disagrees with this understanding of identity and advocacy, arguing that these narrow parameters of identity containers are “social constructed” and limit the “radically different understandings of self and the context that underpin the practices and lives” of human experiences (p.30). While I support the effort to ensure there are exclusive spaces in the labour movement for marginalized positionalities, I agree with Valentine (2007) that ultimately there must be ways to acknowledge the differences and inequalities *within* LGBTQ2S+ as an identity group in strategizing for advocacy best practices.

The segregated identities approach to advocacy is also logistically problematic within the BCGEU. As mentioned previously, the voting of two equity delegates from each equity branch happens during caucuses at convention. Pickles recalls being tokenized as a member of the EHRC, having a leader ask: “oh you’re a part of equity- which one are you?”- as if one’s identity can be reduced in such a way. Pickles also explains challenges of process when segregating groups by identity:

When they did the equity caucuses and we could vote for our members- the voting was at the same time. I said what the fuck is that? What if I identify as both part of the LGBTQ2S+ and [a different equity group] and I’m voting for both? [The leadership] said ‘well pick your dominant one, we’re giving you the opportunity to vote’. I was like, this is bull shit. By the third vote, they decided they were going to stagger them. But we had to fight for that! Something so simple. (Pickles)

Pickles’ frustration at the dysfunction of the identity-segregated approach to advocacy within the BCGEU is notable. Yet, his comments also reflect a concern he was quoted on in an earlier passage: that is, the harm that comes from advocacy efforts that are manipulated and imposed upon members. By saying leadership claimed to be giving the “opportunity” to vote, and changing things to be more accessible was a “fight”, Pickles’ comments draw attention to the small but real manifestations of leadership being the central source of power, and the ongoing harm and distrust this causes within membership. Although Pickles seems satisfied that leadership compromised by staggering the time of each identity caucus election, the leadership ultimately offered a band-aid solution to the non-intersectional approach to equity advocacy with the structure of the committees.

Literature has called into question why L,G,B,T,Q,2S,+ has and continues to be grouped together under one umbrella. In their research on union advocacy for trans workers, Salah (2015) cautions that there's a danger in this lumping of LGBTQ2S+ workers into one group, one experience, one "safe space", particularly for trans workers.

...[in] these attempts to meet trans people's needs through the creation of separate spaces, strategies of 'trans inclusion' in LGBT caucuses and committees... we saw impressive gains but we were simultaneously confronted with the limits of that solidarity and inclusion within these organizations. (p.150).

Ahmed (2006) also speaks to the dangers of lumping trans worker experiences with those of the general LGBTQ2S+ umbrella, noting that "transgender workers' experiences on the job trouble conventional understandings of what does and does not constitute a safe workplace... this queer approach to understanding the labo[u]ring body helps make sense of the uniquely marginal positions of transgender workers" (as quoted in Tiffe, 2013, p.36). Rosechild (she/her), who is an active member of the LGBTQ2S+ caucus and EHRC also spoke to specific concerns of trans workers safety within the BCGEU:

Trans people are definitely keeping their [workplace concerns] on the down low. So many people are just surviving in the closet. (Rosechild)

Karanveer, also noted his specific concerns regarding trans workers at his workplace:

When it comes to the transgender community- at least from what I've seen in my current work place- people will openly roll their eyes on the issue of pronoun use, or how our school boards are going about the issue of gender neutral washrooms, and they'll be loud and vocal about it. And that concerns me. (Karanveer)

In other words, Karanveer is witnessing *explicit* transphobia in his workplace, which he describes as particularly concerning given the vocal, unapologetic, dismissive, and harmful nature of the comments he's heard and gestures, such as eye rolling, that he's witnessed.

Further, Karanveer expressed concerns about things he heard specifically from trans attendees at the LGBTQ2S+ round table:

I think that as a cisgender person who kinda keeps to myself in terms of my sexual identity, I do quite well...I just think that if there's any community that requires some sort of specialty access to some sort of

hotline with the BCGEU, or maybe a very well versed advocate within the BCGEU for some very practical issues like pronoun use, access to washrooms, or even the issue of using a [dead] name at the workplace versus a name which someone currently identifies with- I'm telling you, I was bothered by some of the things I heard there. (Karanveer)

Karanveer highlights his concerns about transphobia in the workplace by looking at his own privileges, noting that "as a cisgender person...I do quite well." He compares this to trans workers he had heard sharing stories at the LGBTQ2S+ round table.

In no way do I wish to suggest that unions abolish the hard work they and the activists prior put in to establish LGBTQ2S+ committees, caucuses, and conferences. The work that enabled these tools and strategies required that people put their jobs or even their lives on the line to establish them (Smith, 2019). Furthermore, these committees and events undoubtedly offer a sense of much needed community to many of the participants I spoke to. Karanveer noted:

The invisibility of LGBT workers and the LGBT cause in my own workplace propelled me to sign up for [the roundtable] to allow me to network with other workers who are like me. But also to raise awareness about what I'm seeing or what I'm not seeing in the workplace. And to see if we can find a kind of solution around that or to learn more about issues that other works might have and see if I can propose any solutions around that too. (Karanveer)

Donna also noted the significance in community building through events such as EHRC conferences, roundtables, and caucuses. She posed important questions about the role of leadership in LGBTQ2S+ advocacy work, while coming back to questioning the material impacts and outcomes of the roundtable:

How do members who are 2SLGBTQ+ build power and understanding the union? How is the union facilitating that kind of awareness and those kinds of networks of support?...Actually, that's one of the things that came up at the roundtable too- how important it was for the member that came to be around other queer or trans union members. For some of them, that's just not their reality. And to know there's someone, even if they're on the other side of the province, there's someone going through something similar to what you're going through and they are just as tired, frustrated, and exhausted. We put up a paper to share contact information so they could stay in touch with each other and I see it on social media- continuing to touch base and have that connection. (Donna)

Overall, Karanveer and Donna both draw attention to the importance of community building within union LGBTQ2S+ efforts, which is absolutely agreed upon

within other literatures and data on LGBTQ2S+ worker prosperity (Ángeles et al., 2020; Tiffe, 2012).

Next I explore a different angle of advocacy built within the structure of the BCGEU: the role of shop stewards, particularly as agents of human rights and LGBTQ2S+ advocates within the union. Further, I take up how this role is linked to Collective Bargaining Agreement language that is intended to advocate for LGBTQ2S+, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses associated with this strategy.

5.4. Shop Stewards & CBAs

This section focuses on the ways interview participants understand the role of stewards and collective bargaining agreements⁴⁸, specifically pertaining to LGBTQ2S+ advocacy at the BCGEU.

Participants in the project noted that CBAs are a powerful means for written recourse in considering LGBTQ2S+ discrimination and advocacy. Donna also spoke to two specific “gains” for LGBTQ2S+ members within the BCGEU CBAs:

We do have some collective agreement language and resolutions that have come out around this stuff, particularly gender neutral pronouns and having family leave... changing things to be more inclusive in that way (Donna).

I understand these specific references to mean gender neutral pronoun use in collective agreements, as Maya expands upon below, and family leave to include queer couples and families, not strictly maternity and paternity leave. Maya (she/her), a steward at the BCGEU who is also involved in the collective bargaining process was excited to elaborate on the process of collective bargaining to shift towards gender neutral language in CBAs:

I insisted that all the language be they/them/theirs, and there was no difficulty. There was a willingness to go there. Without a question the union was on board, and the employer was also like ‘yeah, we need to do that’. (Maya)

⁴⁸ Also called CBAs or collective agreements. The story of how collective agreement language for LGBTQ2S+ members has evolved at the BCGEU is beyond the scope of this project but would be valuable to explore in future research.

It was exciting to hear from Maya a sense of optimism that this progressive improvement to CBA language was welcomed by both the union and employer, rather than something that had to be fought for.

However, barriers to accessing legal, monetary, and written bargaining language as a form of recourse for marginalized workers and union members still persist. In addition to the findings that CBAs are a key tool for advocating for marginalized workers, the UCLA/UFCW also found that although LGBTQ2S+ workers might be *legally* protected from discrimination through CBA language or other human rights laws, awareness and implementation of these protections is sparse and “LGBTQ2S+ workers are still susceptible to differential treatment” (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.4).

It follows that union members are invested in utilizing collective agreements as an agent for LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. As important, stewards have a huge *opportunity* to engage in LGBTQ2S+ advocacy by being visible, accessible, and equipped to intervene with awareness and implementation of the protections of LGBTQ2S+ workers. This could be through broad LGBTQ2S+ protective laws or language won for LGBTQ2S+ worker right in collective bargaining language.

However, there were a few barriers discussed by respondents of the efficacy of stewards undertaking this form of advocacy. First, despite the fact that there’s a great desire to have a point person or advocate specifically to handle members concerns of LGBTQ2S+ related discrimination, stewards at the BCGEU do not have enough training in this area. Pickles pointed out:

If you don’t have a steward that’s aware of these issues, they’re not going to understand. Do [members] feel safe to connect [with their steward]? Because they might have to out themselves because of our model. [Stewards] don’t all know about human rights, but the shop steward is supposed to be the be-all end-all. (Pickles)

Pickles draws attention to a few issues with the current model of stewards being viable advocates for LGBTQ2S+ worker concerns. First, stewards may not explicitly demonstrate their allyship, which could cause great anxiety for a member who has to share vulnerable information with them concerning their grievance (such as having to out themselves, as Pickles mentions). Second, Pickles identifies that stewards aren’t receiving the specific training necessary for LGBTQ2S+ advocacy from the BCGEU.

Bash also expressed concern that stewards lack training specific to LGBTQ2S+ education:

There should be mandatory training for stewards...one just about queer issues. I met a young guy from Fort. St. John, he was a young gay guy who was so enthusiastic, he wanted to know how to bring this back to the sawmill. So I thought, you know, steward training on those issues would be a great first start. (Bash)

In addition to the importance of stewards being trained and practiced towards being trustworthy advocates for LGBTQ2S+ workers, Bash's comments denote that for many union members wanting to become more engaged, becoming trained as a steward is often encouraged as the first step after attending a local meeting.

Finally, the UCLA/UFCW project (2020) noted a similar gap in education within the union on LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, as survey respondents identified staff and shop steward training as one of the top priorities for improving conditions for LGBTQ2S+ workers (Ángeles et al., 2020).

The second barrier in considering the current system of stewards as LGBTQ2S+ advocates is the method by which steward labour is constructed within many unions, the BCGEU included. In their study on steward labour and burnout, Pilemalm et al. (2001) found that shop stewards "occupy a position which has been described as demanding, involving striking a balance between conciliation and tough negotiating, between ordinary and union work, and feelings of isolation from members" (p.569). At the BCGEU, steward time and energy is not compensated, nor are they given additional time off for this work that they perform for the union. In other words, this emotionally laborious and important work is volunteer time. Raccoon (she/her), a queer, BIPOC member and long-serving steward shared her experience of burn out. In our interview, she suggested that the BCGEU consider the compensating care and labour performed by stewards through time off, monetary compensation, or offering mental health support:

I tried to step down from being a shop steward before and the union rep was like 'no you're doing so good' and I was like no, my mental health is taking a huge hit here. I'm overworked and I'm burnt out. (Raccoon)

Raccoon's comments complement Strauss & Meehan's (2015) notion of the unequal ways precarity is experienced. Intersecting forms of oppression – which can be identified

through a worker's positionality – heighten workers' exposure to precarity. Positionality also informs *who* occupies both leadership roles and, in this case, advocacy roles. Members who have lived the realities of marginality, such as Raccoon, are exactly who should be *supported* by the union to do this important advocate work of stewardship. Pickles also hit upon this point, considering positionality, capacity and support in consideration of advocacy work:

Some people just don't have the spoons to do [advocacy]. They're just trying to get through life. It takes a lot of energy and perseverance to fight. And when you have to fight just to get the resources, it's kind of disheartening. (Pickles)

The “spoons” that Pickles mentions refers to the “spoon theory”, a metaphor used to describe the mental or physical energy a person has for daily tasks, activities, and projects (Miserandino, 2013). The degree of capacity varies per person, but as marginalities intersect, the more one must “use spoons”. In utilizing spoon theory, Pickles illustrates the gap between leadership wanting to support having advocates available to members (including for LGBTQ2S+ concerns), and the reality that this work is draining and can therefore be impractical or harmful when advocates are not fully supported to do this important work.

Ruthie (she/her), who participated in this project as an LGBTQ2S+ ally, also reflected on this gap between gratitude for steward labour, and her own trepidation about becoming involved in a steward role, having witnessed the burnout this role can cause:

When my shop steward left, it created a huge hole in my workplace. There were so many grievances where I used to work that I wouldn't have had time for my job, and I was concerned about my own mental health. I'm a single parent, so my volunteer time is limited to say the least. But I don't take [steward labour] for granted, I really don't. (Ruthie)

The data suggests that there is a *need* within the BCGEU for advocacy work: for members grappling with grievances broadly, but especially for the most marginalized workers. One of the challenges in advocating for marginalized members is capturing and regulating discrimination that is subtle, covert, or in the form of micro aggressions. As the UCLA/UFCW report pointed out, collective agreements, grievances, and stewards as intervening agents are only effective at advocacy work insofar as members are aware of

their rights. However, a further complication to utilizing these seminal union advocacy tools is the ability to work through issues that may not neatly fit into the language and description of discrimination as they are written in laws, policies, or collective agreements. Alejandro (he/him), a member of the BCGEU, noted this very issue:

It's easy to say we have all these laws and protections, [but] homophobia and transphobia is subtle. It takes place in the form of micro managing people, it's not outright saying 'you're a fucking f*g, fuck off'. (Alejandro)

Alejandro's use of "we" acknowledges that while LGBTQ2S+ "laws and protections" exist within union settings and unionized workplaces, there is a greater challenge of capturing *implicit* discrimination that falls through the cracks of policy regulation.

LeBlanc (2019) raises similar concerns. She argues that at the end of the day, the grievance process (as mediated by the CBA) is a legal one, and therefore requires substantiating evidence from the members themselves. If a member brings forth lived experience of discrimination, the burden of proof to substantiate that the discrimination happened (through an ironclad paper trail) remains on the target of discrimination. This process often does not capture the nuance of discrimination, particularly when it is implicit. LeBlanc (2019) suggests that ultimately the grievance process and CBA are adversarial and cannot offer remedy to the harmed member.

The next and final element of the BCGEU structure as it pertains to LGBTQ2S+ advocacy I analyze is convention (and the policy changes that come from it), and the role of leadership elected within the convention structure. Within this section I also look closer at the BCGEU as an employer, and illuminate the ways the role of staff in BCGEU LGBTQ2S+ advocacy was taken up in the data.

5.5. Convention & Leadership

Some participants mentioned convention being a place for human rights education. They noted the benefits of this model, as there's an opportunity to reach many members and leaders (and definitely the ones most in power). Maya shared an impactful memory from the previous convention she attended:

At convention there was a trans person who was telling us what it felt like to be who she is and how she did not feel safe going to the

bathroom. To listen to her talking I thought 'wow'. You hear how people are being ridiculed and I'm a lot more compassionate because I actually met this person and heard what her experiences were, and understand her life [isn't] easy. (Maya)

However for those working for systemic change as equity members, there was a sense of ongoing frustration at what participants felt was sidelining of members' concerns. Specifically, marginalized members have difficulty getting their needs and proposed changes to the convention floor. Pickles notes:

If [equity members] don't have a way to get things to convention, it's a bit of tokenism, because we have to go back to our locals. If your locals aren't progressive or don't think it's a priority, [your concerns are] gonna die. [However] I'm on the resolutions committee, and I'm gonna use my white-ass privilege to make sure these things come through. (Pickles)

Pickles offers a lot of insight about the barriers of the convention process. He illuminates how the issue of members' concerns being taken to convention for consideration is first a process issue. But it goes beyond process: a member must first navigate the electoral system to get in a powerful position in the local, or get elected to the resolutions committee, for a proposal to even be considered at convention. This electoral system, as established in the first part of this chapter, is built on a cycle of favouring those who already occupy privilege and confidence (Pickles Interview, 2020). Pickles speaks to using his white privilege as a tool of allyship in the problematic process; however, this individualized effort still does not address the structural flaws of privileging some and leaving others precarious (Strauss & Meehan, 2015).

Pickles also shared what can be identified as a post- convention challenge: that is, to actually see equity-based resolutions be taken up in a meaningful way within the system.

Sometimes, because there's so many resolutions, you're continually [asking] 'have you done something, have you done something?' then it gets a little bit of fucking lipstick and they say 'ok here we did it'. (Pickles)

From Pickles' comment about "get[ting] a little bit of fucking lipstick", I infer that leadership fail to recognize the time and energy resolution integration takes, particularly for equity advocacy or discrimination issues. Because these topics are often nuanced, they require a lot of consultation with the members affected. Here again, the gap

between process and impact is concerning. As Pickles expressed, there is a sense of performativity at work for equity considerations by those in power at the BCGEU.

Another significant role of convention and the overall system of the BCGEU is the election to fill leadership roles. Throughout this chapter, there's been a lot of critique of leadership broadly, especially in relation to support of the LGBTQ2S+ branch of the EHRC. However, some participants also spoke highly of specific leaders, president Stephanie Smith, in particular. Overwhelmingly, participants felt she was well-intentioned yet overwhelmed with the duties required as union president. Therefore, she was perceived to be limited in her ability to activate systemic change for the improvement of LGBTQ2S+ worker advocacy. Rosechild commented:

I think the [LGBTQ2S+] committee has a lot of support from [the president] and the crew. But there's so much more going on her plate that she could say 'ya, that's a great idea', but I don't see it going through. (Rosechild)

Pickles also noted Smith's good intention, noting specifics of the juggling he sees the president maintaining:

[The president is] a good ally. She's a good advocate. She's a formidable person, she'll champion your cause. But she's also balancing the needs of all the other pressures in the union: job security, wages, pensions, and so on. (Pickles)

There is also a lack of diverse positionalities within the leadership team. Bash identifies the predominantly white group of leaders:

[Diversity] is not quite representative in the upper echelons. It's a pretty white group up there. (Bash)

Diversity is lacking within the leadership team of the BCGEU, which is also the case with the leadership in other unions across Canada. This not only impacts members, it also influences the future of union density in the Canadian labour movement. In a statement on the 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike, labour leader Sid Ryan cautioned that the Canadian labour movement leader is "mainly, you know, guys [who] look like me- bald, grey-hair guys... [and] that needs to change, because workers will not join organizations they don't see themselves represented in" (Tremonti, 2019).

5.5.1. Role of Leadership at the BCGEU

In the following section, I unpack how impactful the role and power of leadership are or could be for LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BCGEU. There is no objective metric to quantify this impact; rather, this analysis focuses on the key role leadership plays in the oversight of the union staff recognizing that the elected leaders of the BCGEU are themselves employers⁴⁹.

Having served as a staff person myself within the union, I have witnessed first-hand some of the problematic ways the power of leadership can impact the function of the union and the staff. Yet, very little research or literature exists on the role and perspectives of union *staff* in the Canadian labour movement. As I began to better understand the lack of education and practice of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy among the staff at the BCGEU, I question whether staff themselves may be experiencing homophobia and/or transphobia as workers.

As a leader, Donna spoke about her concerns related to internal practices at the BCGEU. She noted a gap between the practices promoted by leadership, particularly as the union tried to cast itself as a social union, and the way their own staff was being led:

We have the consciousness and the understanding to put [pronouns] on nametags at conferences and convention and then to have a sheet explaining it- assuming this happens in our workshop and training with members... Do we do this with staff? I know for a fact that they don't ask staff for their pronouns when they start working in a department- and you just assume, unless you know to ask someone by saying 'hey my pronouns are she and her, what pronouns do you use?' It just becomes clear it's practiced [for the membership?] in one way, but internally it doesn't seem to be practiced. (Donna)

Donna identifies here the common practice of incorporating pronouns at events focused on union members. She goes on to note that this practice does not extend to the BCGEU as a workplace. Donna thus draws out the gap between intent and practice of the inclusive practice of pronoun-sharing suggesting that there is a systemic disconnect between “public-facing” and internal common practices. Kam (she/her), who has worked

⁴⁹ A common (and ironic) sentiment within unions (the BCGEU included) is a critiquing of the employers of the members they represent; yet, there's very little conversation about how the union operates internally as employers.

at the BCGEU for a few years, immediately raised concerns about the lack of LGBTQ2S+ education, advocacy, and the potential impacts of this:

There are moments that we assume a member's gender: we assume member's genders when we use salutations in letters, when we're speaking about them, when we're talking to them on the phone, when we give a bathroom pass. I can say I've gotten no training on LGBTQ education... I don't know if [my co-workers would] continue to say trans or use [proper] pronouns or they/them. I think they would try their best to the best of their ability. (Kam)

Kam raises concern for a clear lack of education for the front-line staff who are dealing with membership and shop stewards on a day-to-day basis. This gap indicates a lack of guidance from leadership resulting in an internal process that does not match what the union advocates to employers. Given the advocacy measures being undertaken by the BCGEU, this disconnect is not a result of a lack of awareness for *how* to navigate queer lives and identities in the workplace. It is, however, an issue that the BCGEU is not internally practicing the LGBTQ2S+ advocacy work that they are promoting externally to membership at convention or other membership education settings.

Kam's experience further demonstrates the limits of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy in everyday protocols like letter-writing. She shared:

In terms of pronouns, we still refer to Mr. and Mrs. in all our letters. I have brought it up to my department head, and until it comes from up above⁵⁰, the guidance I was given is that I have to continue to use that... So we are still referring to Mr and Mrs and in UnionWare, which is our database. We still gender members as part of our demographics⁵¹. (Kam)

Kam's attempt to advocate for LGBTQ2S+ best practice within the duties she's expected to perform offer an example of hitting a rigid wall of union practice. Arguably, the organization's internal practices take a step backwards in advocating for LGBTQ2S+ members. Kam's comments also demonstrate the ways advocacy within the union are

⁵⁰ While I cannot be certain what "above" means specifically, my understanding from working as a secretary was that change in procedure could come from convention resolutions/policies, provincial executive, and/or the leadership (president and secretary treasurer).

⁵¹ At the 2017 convention a resolution was passed to ensure all applicants to the BCGEU were asked on the membership intake form to provide a "preferred name" in addition to their legal name. This was integrated within the organization as of February 2021. The form does not ask for preferred pronouns, meaning staff are still assuming pronouns to use when corresponding with members.

interlocking. To name one example, even if the union were to be successful in educating stewards to be strong LGBTQ2S+ advocates and intervene with transphobia in the workplace, trans or non-binary members might confront transphobia the moment they walk into the BCGEU building to have to use the washroom, or on the phone as they register their union membership.

Another concern for the leadership approach towards staff is the differential treatment of staff based on their category/role within the organization. Kam works as a “secretary”⁵². My own experience working as a secretary at the BCGEU involved very clear guidelines that as a secretary, one is expected to follow rules strictly, unless first getting approval from a supervisor: the font of the emails is an example of the specificity of those guidelines. When working as a secretary⁵³, it felt like engaging in advocacy work was actually a *privilege* rather than built within each layer of the organizational structure as the BCGEU might claim. Kam expanded on these concerns; she felt excluded from any elements of the union beyond the day-to-day paperwork:

I feel like I don't know a lot about what's going on with the BCGEU as a union or with their activism. I don't know what's going on in terms of new organizing efforts, in terms of who was recently organized⁵⁴, in terms of campaigns and big initiatives, in terms of day to day or season to season- the updates on the website don't talk about that in an overall perspective but rather the component level. I don't have access to the member portal⁵⁵... I think reps can go and support rallies as a part of work but support [staff] has to do it on their own time. (Kam).

⁵² Kam shared “my position is called support staff but on my paystub is ‘secretary.’” She felt that “the title needs to be updated, secretary comes with a lot of old school mentality of a female secretary”. I refer to this position as secretary as this is the official job title. Internally, the role is often referred to as support staff.

⁵³ Secretarial work has a long history of being both feminized and racialized in North America (Kennelly, 2002). Stinson and Richmond 's (1993) research found that although the women working within unions were overwhelmingly passionate in the belief that unions are essential in organizing to fight worker exploitation, many women staff and activists were angry and hurt by the way they were treated within the union. Further, they found there was “occupational segregation on the basis of sex” as the vast majority of women working for unions are employed as clerical workers (p.139). While there is a notable improvement in the number of people who identify as femme/women in positions outside of clerical workers within the union (such as union reps and management), it holds that the majority of secretary/clerical workers identify as women (Milkman, 2016).

⁵⁴ “Organized” refers to belonging to the union.

⁵⁵ The BCGEU website is split into a member portal and general public portal. Only members, leadership, and union reps can access the member portal on the BCGEU website, whereas secretary staff can't.

By supporting all workers within the union to engage in human rights advocacy work and feel solidarity amongst their own colleagues, the BCGEU has an opportunity to model the type of workplace they claim to promote in the workplaces of their members.

In the final segment of this chapter, I examine the ways participants have materially experienced the advocacy systems in practice within the BCGEU. I begin by considering the limitations of investing in Pride involvement as a core LGBTQ2S+ advocacy tactic. I then explore the role of being “out” at work or within the union, and how this impacts a broader sense of fitting in. Finally, I present the benefits and desire for the BCGEU to extend LGBTQ2S+ advocacy efforts beyond membership, and how this relates to social unionism as a framework.

5.6. Beyond the Pride Parade

A major concern that came up in the data was that the BCGEU has overly focused LGBTQ2S+ advocacy efforts that prioritize the organization’s involvement in Pride parades. Indeed, LGBTQ2S+ advocacy at the BCGEU is framed on its website through its involvement with Pride, which is showcased in a letter from president Stephanie Smith:

The BCGEU is proud once again to march in solidarity with the LGBTQI2S+ community alongside our members at the [Pride parade]...but Pride is more than a parade and more than a celebration. Pride is a movement...started by activists demanding visibility, equality, rights, and respects...and the Pride movement has survived and thrived in communities on every continent, in every country, across the world...because the values it espouses are universal. (Stephanie Smith, BCGEU President, 2018).

Here, Smith aligns BCGEU advocacy of LGBTQ2S+ issues singularly with Pride. Nowhere else ⁵⁶are LGBTQ2S lives represented by the BCGEU; it appears as though Pride functions as the site of BCGEU advocacy. This poses a problem for several reasons. First, having a singular focus means that even if other initiatives are being

⁵⁶ This observation is made from overviewing the BCGEU’s Twitter and website, however, the BCGEU website portal is split into public and member access, so it is possible more LGBTQ2S+ resources and information is available to members and I simply can’t see it as I don’t have access. This exclusivity poses its own problems, given that prospective members or those wanting information generally on workplace support but who may not be a member of the BCGEU might benefit from seeing this “member only” information. This approach to accessibility does not align with the social unionist vision of the union reaching its support beyond membership.

undertaken, they are less visible in the shadow of Pride. Donna mentioned concerns of this strategy, noting:

It's hard not to feel like a lot [the BCGEU's LGBTQ2S+ advocacy] is superficial. We've participated in Pride, and for some communities we may have been the first union to participate in a Pride...[however] it just feels like as a union, I wouldn't be able to name too much [else] we do as the BCGEU [for LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. (Donna)

While the energy of visible solidarity through Pride is important, I agree with Donna's sentiment. Pride as focal point for union advocacy is superficial, as it does not work to interrogate the ideas and structures that contribute to LGBTQ2S+ worker discrimination in the first place.

From the vantage point of Finn (she/her), a queer member of 26 years, the sole effort of the union concerning LGBTQ2S+ advocacy is attending Pride:

The only thing I really see from [the BCGEU] about [LGBTQ2S+ advocacy] is Pride parade stuff. Aside from that, I don't hear much in terms of LGBTQ2S+ stuff [within the union]. (Finn)

As Finn's comments suggest, if there is other LGBTQ2S+ advocacy happening, it does not get communicated in a way that rivals the attention BCGEU gives to Pride.

The second concern related to Pride serving as a central fixture of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy is the financial investment. Pickles mentioned that Pride in fact is a major consideration of the budget for the LGBTQ2S+ branch of the EHRC committee at the BCGEU. Further, as Pride events now take place in many cities throughout BC, that budget⁵⁷ is spread even more thin.

Third, there is an ideological vision, as discussed by Smith in her letter above, that is worth unpacking. I agree with Smith that indeed, Pride is a movement. The Pride movement was born from the resistance of queers (primarily BIPOC) fighting back against policy brutality, such as the riot at Gene Compton's Cafeteria (1966) and the Stonewall rebellion (1969) (Tiffe, 2013, p.105). However, the idea that there are

⁵⁷ While I did not have the opportunity to see the overall budget process for the BCGEU on LGBTQ2S+ advocacy matters, I suspect integrating the advocacy suggestions from this project (ie: more education, training and supporting an LGBTQ2S+ advocate, and/or supporting the labour of marginalized workers to volunteer for the union) would depend on budgetary availability.

universal values celebrated within the culture of Pride events as they're performed today is troubling. In fact, Pride parades have been shown to make streets safer for white gays, which simultaneously contributes to the criminalization of youth of colour (Tiffe, 2013; Bain, 2017). Further, the notion that queerness is exclusively bound up by identity, rather than politicization, reinforces Smith's comments of the universal LGBTQ2S+ experience.

The concept of homonormativity explores this very issue: seeing LGBTQ2S+ people in a homogenized way. With a homonormative approach to LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, such as the investment in Pride by the BCGEU (and the Canadian labour movement more broadly), advocacy work focuses on assimilation into straight privilege and the rights that heterosexual members have, rather than challenging power and structural change.

The UCLA/UFCW research also examined the role of Pride events. In response to the question: "what the priority for the union should be in organizing on LGBTQ+ issues", the researchers found that only 17% of respondents were invested in Pride as a priority for union advocacy work (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.18). By comparison, anti-discrimination language in collective agreements and training for staff and shop stewards were recorded as the most important.

With this said, the ULCA/UFCW also cite one respondent who felt very affirmed seeing their union visible at Pride, and roughly one third of respondents had participated in Pride events. I too am very happy to see the BCGEU and Canadian labour movement more broadly visible and engaged at Pride. However, through the collection of this data, it became quite clear to me that the BCGEU puts many of their advocacy efforts only towards Pride involvement, rather than towards investing in larger, structural, and politicized change.



Figure 8. Unions Support Pride
Credit: Sarah Cibart, 2015

5.7. Fitting In / Being Out

When it comes to advocacy efforts that were high priorities for LGBTQ2S+ members of the BCGEU, the data shows that a sense of belonging, whether within the union or at work, was significant to participants. Furthermore, this sense of belonging was heavily related to whether participants felt they could be “out”⁵⁸. Similarly, UCLA/UFCW also found that being “out” was a significant indicator of an inclusive workplace and union. They also found that people who were not out had concerns about being out at work at all, mainly surrounding the fear of being “stereotyped, perceived as unprofessional, or losing social connections or relationships” if their colleagues and employers knew they identified as LGBTQ2S+ (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.45). Further, their data showed that nearly one-third of respondents said they felt unsafe being open as LGBTQ2S+ at work, and some feared they would experience harassment, be ostracized, denied a promotion, or fired.

⁵⁸ UCLA/UFCW define being “out” as “whether LGBTQ+ people feel comfortable with coworkers [and their union] knowing about their identity, relationships, or family” (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.44).

Karanveer also spoke to the impacts of not being “out” at work and feeling a sense of invisibility. He shared:

I mean, I’m not open. [My workplace] may perceive that I’m a certain way, but I don’t advertise it [and] I certainly don’t speak a lot about my personal life, so it’s possible that other people don’t do that either. But that creates an atmosphere where people kind of keep to themselves and then the LGBT stuff is just kind of invisible...So I think it’s really hard for closeted people or people struggling to express themselves to do that on their own. (Karanveer)

Karanveer highlights that it is important that employers take initiative (potentially through union intervention) to support LGBTQ2S+ workers in feeling safe to come out in their workplace. The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion research findings in a research project titled *Diverging Perspectives on LGBT Inclusion in the Workplace* (2015) also supported this point from both Karanveer’s experiences and the findings of UFCW/UCLA. They found that being “out” at work was one of the most significant factors to consider in evaluating the safety of a workplace for LGBTQ2S+ workers. They note that if in the workplace, if no one is “out”, employers should ask themselves what about the culture or environment of their workplace is deterring people from disclosing their identity (Sasso & Ellard-Gray, 2015, p.16).

So how is the BCGEU, encouraging being “out” and helping members feel “in” their workplaces, unions, and communities? Multiple respondents noted the importance and need for community building amongst LGBTQ2S+ members at the BCGEU. This notion of community building through the union is considered a “core value” of the Canadian labour movement (Ross et al., 2015, p.3). To encourage this mission, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has held week long union education schools across the country for many years, with the goal of helping members connect on a personal level. For the BCGEU, this event is called the Canadian Labour Congress Winter School, and is held annually at Harrison Hot Springs. Anecdotally, I can confirm the logic behind these events, both from my personal experience attending and from working at these CLC labour schools over the years, mostly in Saskatchewan. There can be a demonstrated benefit of union members coming together outside of the workplace and the formality of union meetings to connect, commiserate, and have fun! CLC labour schools also offer important education opportunities which I’ve engaged in both as a participant and as a facilitator, on topics ranging from human rights advocacy in the

workplace, supporting members who may be survivors of interpersonal violence, and decolonizing unions and workplaces.

However, BCGEU participants also identified important concerns for ways community building efforts have been the source of negative impacts for marginalized members. Labour schools can go in the opposite direction, for example: they can function as spaces of harm at the cost of marginalized members. In contrast to Bash's suggestion for community *building*, participants mentioned the Harrison school as a site of exclusion. For example, Maya mentioned Harrison school as a place where she felt trepidation and was unsure of her safety:

I go to Harrison Hot Springs a lot for the CLC and at some of the events some of the people do a lot of drinking...when you drink sometimes people are silly, and I won't let myself drink too much there...sometimes I feel a little uncomfortable, you know, unions can sometimes feel very vulnerable because everybody is out there... I don't know that it feels safe. (Maya)

Maya notes that the party-like atmosphere of the CLC schools feels vulnerable, which resonated with me having witnessed these environments myself. There is an unstated expectation that everyone gets along as "union comrades". Additionally, participants in the labour school are expected to share a hotel room with someone randomly assigned by event organizers and may not be able to "escape" to privacy and safety. As a cisgender young woman, I often found myself feeling increasingly unsafe as some union attendees got drunk and often would start pushing boundaries (especially as I was working). Other marginalized attendees may have felt vulnerable and unsafe in these environments as well.

Finn, a queer member of the BCGEU for over 26 years, shared that after attending Harrison school, she decided she no longer wanted to have any involvement with the BCGEU. She recalled:

[The] GEU has their retreat at Harrison Hot Springs every year... and that's actually where I lost a lot of, I guess, faith. Although there was a lot of workshops being done, it was a weekend of partying, and I kinda lost it after that. (Finn)

I asked Finn if she felt like she fit in as a queer person at the Harrison school and she replied:

Oh god, no, no, no. It was entirely straight. I was actually out at the time, but I certainly would not have outed myself in that scenario at all. It was the culture, feel of the place. I don't know how much was time period or what, but it was very much a hetero [space]. (Finn)

Finn's reflection that having attended the CLC labour school decades ago worsened her experience may have been informed by a different union culture, as discrimination may have been more *explicit* decades ago. While I can't speak for Finn's experience, having been at a labour school in the last 5 years, there seems to be a lot of similarities in our felt sense of discomfort at these schools.

Maya and Finn's experiences at Harrison school indicate that there are gaps between intention of the union and experience within the union, particularly for LGBTQ2S+ workers. Raccoon shared her frustrations at the ignorance of her colleagues concerning LGBTQ2S+ allyship and the toll this labour to educate them has taken on her as a queer person:

Because I'm pansexual, people have asked me at my workplace what my sexual orientation or preference is. Everyone's like 'I don't know if you're gay or straight' and it's like, well, neither. So having to explain what pansexual is to people and pronouns and stuff can be a lot after a while. (Raccoon)

Rosechild also shared her exhaustion constantly having to justify her identity to her peers, sharing that she's tired of people "always bugging me about being bisexual, so I didn't dare tell them I was poly...I felt discriminated against" (Rosechild Interview, 2020). In these calls for education comes a need for understanding the significance of ally work, creating space rather than hierarchies, and considering the barriers the current structure of the BCGEU creates specifically for marginalized members.

By taking initiative and investment in LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, particularly through education, the BCGEU has an opportunity to show members they in fact are *in* and can feel supported to be *out*. This investment, both financial and philosophical, is exactly what unions were founded on, and arguably how the labour movement can build density (Ross, 2007).

5.8. Advocacy Beyond the Union

According to Ross (2007), despite great confusion on what the concept of 'social unionism' really entails, one criterion that is widely shared is that this approach and framework of union organizing seeks to improve the broader community, beyond the scope of union members themselves (p.17). In many ways I can see the BCGEU making an effort to identify themselves as a social movement union: for instance, through language such as "your union", and the infographic that puts membership at the top, which deflects from the sense that there's a top-down leadership structure. Likewise, BCGEU's publicity of being involved with Pride contributes to the sense that they are a social movement union. However, in considering how the BCGEU promotes LGBTQ2S+ beyond the union itself, Donna spoke to her concerns for the lack of union intervention within workplaces in addressing homophobic and transphobic employers:

It just feels like there's a lot more that could be done in terms of actually addressing transgressions coming from the employer- whether it's addressing the employer- or [addressing transgressions] from other members or even staff. There hasn't been as much to look at in terms of [this type] of advocacy. (Donna)

Raccoon also spoke to her hopes that the BCGEU will do more to intervene in workplaces to protect LGBTQ2S+ workers:

I think the union could be doing a way better job of informing their worksites for more diversity instead of just doing that at the union. (Raccoon)

Raccoon's point is an apt one, as not all members can or want to attend local meetings, yet could benefit from this education. Further, Raccoon's suggestion is a great example of taking up the tenet of social unionism: union engagement in community outreach (ie: education and support beyond the engaged union activists).

However, on a more hopeful note, Ruthie, who works with youth in the social services sector, noted how she sees the ripple effect the BCGEU advocacy efforts for LGBTQ2S+ workers can have:

I believe the union not only supports our staff, but also our clients, because they are the ones directly impacted by our wellbeing or lack of wellbeing. (Ruthie)

Further, Bash actually gave an example of an attempt made by the BCGEU to intervene when an employer was perpetrating transphobic behaviour:

We had a specific issue in my workplace, a non-binary worker who uses they/them, presented feminine, but used those pronouns, and a lot of staff did some eye rolling. We all stumble over pronouns, especially in a female-identified shelter where we've been using she pronouns (some people for 9 or 10 years now), [and] I'm not all over people because of that, but it was the eye rolling aspect of it, and this person felt very disrespected of their identity. [The BCGEU] were totally willing to come in and give a workshop...[however] the employer didn't want it. The [union] staff rep said they could organize a workshop. I offered that to the employer and they said no. (Bash)

In other words, the union is responsive in reactive situations, which is a great start. However, having proactive education and training could prevent these discriminatory incidents in the first place.

The UCLA/UFCW also took up this question of how the union was working to improve conditions not only within the union and its membership, but within the broader community. One of their suggestions for improvements on this front, based off data findings, was for the union to “continue to advocate for and expand local and federal legislation that protects LGBTQ+ workers from structural forms of oppression” such as gendered dress codes and gender-specific bathrooms (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.7). Further, on a micro scale, their research found that LGBTQ2S+ workers are also experiencing homophobic and transphobic discrimination from customers/consumers- further confirming a need for systemic change and public LGBTQ2S+ education. Here again, this remains as a research gap overall in labour literature, as I cannot fully dive into it here.

This chapter began with an overview of the structure of the BCGEU, specifically highlighting the ways hierarchy and impacts the accessibility for members to become involved with the union. I explored the ways LGBTQ2S+ advocacy has been taken up in BCGEU through the perspectives of interview participants, specifically highlighting the LGBTQ2S+ branch of the Equity and Human Rights Committee, the role of shop stewards and the collective agreement to which they uphold within the union, and finally the role of convention, leadership, and the BCGEU as an employer themselves. Lastly, I looked at the ways these mechanisms of the structure impacted the experiences of respondents considering LGBTQ2S+ advocacy: exploring the limitations of Pride parade

involvement as a focal point for advocacy efforts within the union, and highlighting the role of being out/in (the closet) and how this impacts a sense of belonging within the union or workplace. Finally I discussed the significance expanding LGBTQ2S+ advocacy beyond union members to the larger community, and how this relates to the framework of social unionism.

A gap remains as the BCGEU leadership emphasize an appearance of embodying social unionism, yet lack real consideration for who is able to access solidarity and rights within the union. It would appear through the data of this project that the structure of the BCGEU limits the real advocacy that needs to be done for the workers most at the margins, specifically LGBTQ2S+ workers and members (Ross, 2007). Donna characterized this gap between the union *wanting* to support LGBTQ2S+ members, and the lived reality within the system:

If people aren't able to be their authentic selves and be accepted... then I think it can be really isolating and you feel like you don't matter. You feel like the union isn't going to address your issues because you haven't seen otherwise. So how are we supposed to tell someone 'no, we care about [LGBTQ2S+ advocacy]', but their own experience has said otherwise? (Donna)

Bash likewise really captured the tension between the intention and the reality when discussing what she witnesses within the BCGEU, and yet, still worrying about the ways LGBTQ2S+ workers are falling through the cracks. Great work is being done, and members can easily still fall through the cracks.

I always find when I go to other union events how progressive BCGEU is, which is kind of painful because you just go 'oh I'm taking that for granted' whether that's land acknowledgements, or making sure peoples pronouns are on their nametags, but I know that as you get farther down, you know I sit on my local executive and I know prison guards aren't that progressive, and I worry about people from my community in those situations. (Bash)

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

While great progress has been made in advocating for LGBTQ2S+ workers both within the BCGEU and the broader Canadian labour movement, the hierarchy of the union structure and its inaccessibility remain significant barriers in *queering* the Canadian labour movement. With those challenges in mind, this section aims to explore the nuance and complexity a broad spectrum of experiences, ideas, and suggestions as they were generated during participant interviews. Thus, I begin the conclusion of the thesis noting three key suggestions for the BCGEU in regards to LGBTQ2S+ advocacy improvements. Next, I review the thesis chapter by chapter. I then note limitations of the project, and suggestions for future research. Finally, I conclude with contributions made from the project, both for academia and the broader community.

6.1. Data Driven Recommendations

1. LGBTQ2S+ education and training is necessary internally at the BCGEU for staff, stewards, leadership, and membership.

This suggestion can be broken into a few pieces. First, the internal practices of the union as an employer are important: modelling LGBTQ2S+ advocacy by offering advocacy education to BCGEU staff is comparatively easy to implement, which makes it an accessible place to start. Second, offering LGBTQ2S+ education and training to members – by, for example, building this into a CBA to be conducted at the workplace – could offer a significant opportunity to support members such as Karanveer, who noted:

I think it's really hard for closeted people or people struggling to express themselves to do [advocacy] on their own. There could be room for the union to do work there, where they actually host interactive presentations where they make people learn about some of these issues. (Karanveer)

As Karanveer notes, the union could take initiative to offer LGBTQ2S+ training and education encourage a safer work environment for LGBTQ2S+ members. Moreover, this initiative also has the potential to alleviate the burden that its members typically shoulder of educating their colleagues themselves.

The third component of this recommendation is that by prioritizing all parties *within* the BCGEU mentioned above, the folks involved in the collective bargaining process and grievance procedures would be more equipped to strengthen LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the union. For example, the BCGEU has started the process of committing to gender neutral washrooms in any new BCGEU building going forward. However, the process of acquiring new members names and pronouns is still very cissexist. With more education, more clarification, and prioritization of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, measures could be not only possible but more likely. Finally, steward training is offered to locals all over the province, and therefore the BCGEU has an opportunity to liaison and deliver LGBTQ2S+ education and advocacy on the front line through this avenue.

2. The BCGEU needs an LGBTQ2S+ advocate role.

I think we need a first sentence that specifies what this advocate role would do. Then move into who would do it. Given the information above, it's possible that stewards *with adequate LGBTQ2S+ education and training* could be this advocate, however, first the BCGEU must explicitly include LGBTQ2S+ education into steward training. Further, two additional considerations must be made before stewards can proceed as confident LGBTQ2S+ advocates. First, the BCGEU must adequately support stewards and/or an advocate to avoid burn out and being expected to perform these tasks as a form of unpaid labour. Raccoon, who has experienced the impact of steward burn out, made specific suggestions:

I think [the BCGEU] having a contract with the employer staying 'hey, this is a really taxing position, when a person has meetings all day, can they not come into work this evening or can they have a day off?' Or even paying [stewards], or giving us opportunities for counselling [provided by the BCGEU]. (Raccoon)

Second, and closely related, who occupies the role of advocate matters. Beyond the training of these representatives, it is best practice for the union to support those who embody the lived knowledge and experiences of being LGBTQ2S+ to be centred in the role of union LGBTQ2S+ advocate.

3. The BCGEU needs to have a more accessible structure to increase involvement of LGBTQ2S+ members, particularly within leadership.

Enabling greater access to navigate the structure of the BCGEU could look many different ways. However, an important starting place is to encourage coalition building between members (EHRC members in particular) and leadership within the union. For this coalition to be successful, there must be a loosening of power from leadership. For example, supporting members to be actively involved in the organizing of human rights events such as the EHRC round tables, and full transparency around the allocation of budget for advocacy measures. The UFCW/UCLA report had a similar finding, noting a need for unions to increase “visible, clear, and concrete” organizational understanding “to ensure [that] LGBTQ+ workers and members, especially young people and people of colo[u]r are represented and promoted within all tiers of the union” (Ángeles et al., 2020, p.7).

6.2. Thesis in Review

This thesis began looking at the fundamental question of the ways LGBTQ2S+ advocacy is taken up in the Canadian labour movement. Chapter 2 highlighted the research method used for the project: semi-structured qualitative interviews with the BCGEU as a case study. In Chapter 3, I highlighted the ways I was utilizing a social unionist framework to understand the data, and layered in queer theory understandings of marginality and identity. Chapter 4 looked at the background of the BCGEU, establishing the histories and definitions of key advocacy strategies currently taken up by the union. Lastly Chapter 5 explored direct quotes from interviews, highlighting the ways participants experienced the various LGBTQ2S+ advocacy tactics promoted by the BCGEU.

6.3. Limitations & Future Research

6.3.1. Two Spirit Experiences in Canadian Unions

A significantly under researched area in labour studies and queer literature alike is Two Spirit⁵⁹ experiences within colonial institutions (i.e., “the workforce”). Throughout

⁵⁹ Two Spirit (sometimes referred to as Two-Spirit, two spirit, or 2S) was a term first coined in 1990 at the Native American and Canadian Aboriginal LGBT people gathering in Winnipeg. The founding group used it as a term to reflect the “historical acceptant of gender-variant peoples and diverse sexual identities within Indigenous communities in pre-contact times” (OUTSaskatoon,

this project I reference LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, but give very little focus towards the 2S specifically. Worse is that any research of colonialism and Indigenous sovereignty within the Canadian labour movement in general is lacking (Camfield, 2019). Camfield (2019) further notes: “inattention to settler colonialism within labour studies in Canada has several sources... most of the antiracist theories that have had an impact on labour studies have either not analysed the oppression of Indigenous peoples in terms of colonialism or have subsumed anticolonial struggle as one component of a larger antiracist struggle” (p.149). While I was unable to give due attention to this area of research within this thesis, I strongly agree with Camfield (2019) that “integrating an analysis of settler colonialism” in labour studies has the potential of reparation between settler and Indigenous workers, as “Indigenous union members have long encountered both interpersonal racism from other union members and systemic racism within union organizations” (p.168-169).

I am specifically interested in more literature that seeks to better understand Indigenous LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit experiences within Canadian unions. That said, Wilson & Liang (2018) caution that as Two Spirit literature has continued to emerge, “...white men, often gay-identified, [have] authored the vast majority of the literature on [Two Spirit] people...we need to be mindful of the colonial relationship between the people who position themselves as the authors of our stories and ourselves as their (frequently fetishized) subjects” (p.139). Robertson (2017) noted that even within the TRC⁶⁰, in a 4000-page report covering testimonies of residential school abuse, Two Spirit people are only mentioned in *half* a page. However, on a more hopeful note, Elder Blu Waters assured that while residential schools used education to erase Two Spirit history, it is through education that Two Spirit stories can be restored (2017).

n.d.). As an umbrella term, Two Spirit captures the roles people held prior to colonization, though notably the “specific teaching, roles, meanings, and language must come from the community” (OUTSaskatoon, n.d.). After Elder Myra Laramee coined this term as an identity, she shared her vision of her Anishinaabemowin name of *niizh manidoowag* which translates closely to “having the ability to be neutral through the lens of having both feminine spirit and masculine spirit within one’s body” (OUTSaskatoon, n.d.). While this identity is specific to being Indigenous, Two Spirit is not a term used interchangeably to refer to all Indigenous LGBTQ2S+ or Indigenous Queer experiences (UBC Two-Spirit & Indigiqueer Studies, 2020). I argue for more research on colonialism within unions, and this includes considering experiences and impacts of those who identify as Two Spirit, and those who are Indigenous LGBTQ+ workers.

⁶⁰ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) comes out of the Indian Schools Settlement Agreement. It’s mandated is “to inform Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools” and “document the truth of survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected” by this experience (TRC, 2021).

In June 2020, Pride at Work Canada held a *Two-Spirit Inclusion in the Workplace* panel to “bring light to many ways that two-spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous [workers] are instigators of innovation and inclusion in workplaces” (Pride at Work Canada, 2020). In this panel, Jarret Leaman (2020) noted that the “2S” is often included in the acronyms describing queer and trans communities, yet the meaning of this identity “remains widely unknown in many circles.” (Pride at Work, 2020). Saylesh Wesley (2020) shared a metaphor of navigating work as a Two Spirit person noting: “[Two Spirit] folks dwell in the margins of society...[and] when you experience multiple forms of oppression it can feel as though you descend deeper into a ditch. The deeper one gets into the ditch, the harder it can be to see what’s happening above ground” (Pride at Work, 2020). Wesley (2020) concluded that these challenges mean “we all have more to work on [and] this includes allyship from people who are not Indigenous”. Notably, neither the Canadian labour movement nor unions were mentioned at this panel.

I urge labour and LGBTQ+ activists and scholars to take seriously this call for Two Spirit advocacy, particularly within Canadian labour. To draw from Driskill’s (2016) notion of “doubleweaving”, a framework for bringing together “queer studies and Native studies”, I challenge activists and scholars to integrate a triple weaving of sorts, adding labour studies into the conversation as well (p.347).

Diverse Voices in Union Research

In Chapter 2, I noted that a limitation of this project was the lack of trans, non binary, Two-Spirit (as mentioned above), and BIPOC contributors in particular. With that said, the First Nations principles of Ownership Control Access and Possession (OCAP) note that “the gathering of information and its subsequent use” of Indigenous (and other historically marginalized positions listed above) experience in research is “inherently political”, and there has been a lack of consultation with people who occupy these positions about “who should gather that information, who should maintain it, who should have access to it” (First Nations Information Government Centre, 2021). Further, researchers should ask whether projects are relevant to the questions, priorities, and concerns of those to which their research aims to serve. With these considerations in mind, given adequate time, care, capacity, consultation, and financial support for the labour for contributors, future research on LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the Canadian

labour movement would greatly benefit from the wisdom of trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, and BIPOC union members, staff, and leadership.

6.3.2. Queering Labour and Union Density in Canada

In every interview for this project I asked each participant about their understandings and experiences of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BCGEU. However, I also asked each of them, “Can you tell me about the role you see unions playing in Canada at this time and/or in the future?” Overwhelmingly, the participants expressed gratitude for what unions generally, or the BCGEU specifically, had done to improve their rights as workers. While I could not fully explore the research question of how LGBTQ2S+ advocacy does or could increase in union density in the BCGEU (or in Canada), this research is a worthy one to explore. Tiffe (2013) agrees in an American context as well that while “it’s a bold move to argue that organized labo[u]r is a solution to anything” given the decrease in union density⁶¹ in North America, a queerer labour movement could “propos[e] an alternative possibility...[and] respond to crisis through a struggle against both economic *and* social injustice” (p.8). Measuring both the economic and social (i.e., structural, educational, safety) challenges unions are facing has great potential for resurgence of the Canadian labour movement.

6.4. Knowledge Mobilization (Academia and Beyond)

This thesis contributes to literature across disciplines, including women and gender studies, queer studies, and labour studies. While there is a growing body of North American literatures calling into question union utility (Farnhill, 2018; Keenan, 2015; Kumar & Schenk, 2006; Voss, 2010; Yates, 2019), and how unions advocate for marginalized workers (Briskin, 2014; Foley & Baker, 2009; Honey, 2000; Ledwith, 2012; Milkman, 2016; Ross, 2007), few turn explicitly to queer theory as a framework to approach radical change, particularly in Canada. Further, while queer theory and gender studies in has certainly been used to contribute to analysis on the institution of work as a cite of homo/transphobia in Canada (Baker & Lucas, 2017; DeSouza et al., 2017; Waite, 2020), few have called to question ways that the Canadian labour movement and unions

⁶¹ Given that the last time data was gathered on unionization rates/density in Canada on a nation scale was in 2014, this is also an area of research needed on a federal level.

do or do not impact the experience of being a queer worker, or how the labour movement could queer the experience of being a worker.

Upon completion of the thesis defence, I will reach out to the BCGEU to meet to discuss key findings from the project. I hope to present findings and anonymized quotations from the research at the BCGEU local meetings, and hopefully generate discussions on how this research does/does not resonate with folks, and how they could see proposed findings being integrated within their locals. Further, I hope to share findings at a broader scale, such as the BCGEU convention or other union conventions within Canada. I believe being transparent with these findings gives an opportunity for the BCGEU to be seen as a leader in taking social unionism and gaps in current LGBTQ2S+ advocacy strategies seriously, and that these findings will not only illuminate potential changes, as well as the good work that is being done. Lastly, it is my hope for the wisdom of research participants in the data of this project to make its way to union education curriculum, both within the BCGEU training (such as for shop stewards and new staff) and more broadly at union education schools such as the CLC Harrison Union School.

6.5. Final Thoughts

I began this thesis with a reflection of my own experiences in Canadian union culture, that both affirmed my queer identity and called to question the rigidity of the gender advocacy I had witnessed in the feminist organizing within the labour movement. This thesis illuminates a similar contradiction of both the beneficial and limiting elements of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BCGEU.

With the recommendations from research participants in mind, I conclude this thesis with a sense of hope shared by Tiffe's (2013) findings as well: there is strength in coalitional politics between the LGBTQ2S+ movement and Canadian labour. These movements remind us that both LGBTQ2S+ advocates and the working/poor folks share the oppression of discrimination and weight of late stage capitalism, thus:

“...this queer coalitional belonging acknowledges how economic inequality enables the maintenance of identity-based oppression, and thus suggests that to fight against that oppression, one must simultaneously struggle for the redistribution of wealth” (p.22-23).

While the material realities of stereotypes and discrimination weigh heavily on LGBTQ2S+ workers and union members, there is both hope in coalition building (for both movements), and this thesis provides a clear call for action.

References

- Aivalis, C. (2018). *The Constant Liberal : Pierre Trudeau, organized labour, and the Canadian social democratic left*. BC, Canada: UBC Press.
- Baker, S. J. & Lucas, K. (2017). Is it safe to bring myself to work? Understanding LGBTQ experiences of workplace dignity. *Can J Adm Sci*, 34, 133-148. DOI: 10.1002/cjas.1439.
- Bain, B. (2016). Queers and trans say no to police presence at Pride parade. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/queers-and-trans-say-no-to-police-presence-at-pride-parade-108643>
- BC Government and Service Employees' Union. (n.d.). https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bcgeu/pages/10956/attachments/original/1591746328/BCGEU_structure_-_Components___Infostructure.pdf
- BC Government and Service Employees' Union. (2017). https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/5892277533893f02be000000/attachments/original/1506030341/BCGEU_Constitution_and_Bylaws_-_2017.pdf
- BC Government and Service Employees' Union. (2019). *BCGEU100 series: Diversity & equity in the BCGEU* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gn0-6vVoRM&ab_channel=BCGEU
- BC Government and Service Employees' Union. (2020). *Welcome to our union: A guide to the advantages of union membership, workers' rights & safety at work*. <http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/5f08ca7dc294805f3b95b8e1/attachments/original/1607120691/member-guide-V3-2020-11-27-web.pdf>
- Thomas, Mark. (2003). Errol Black and Jim Silver (Eds.). Building a Better World: An Introduction to Trade Unionism in Canada. *Left History*, 9(1). DOI: 10.25071/1913-9632.5638
- Brah, A. & Phoenix, A. (2004). Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3), 75-86. <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol5/iss3/8>
- Briskin, L. (2014). Austerity, Union Policy, and Gender Equality Bargaining. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 20(1), 115-133. DOI: 10.1177/1024258913515161
- Boellstorff et al., (2014). Decolonizing transgener: A roundtable discussion. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1(3), 419-439. DOI: 10.1215/23289252-2685669
- Browne, K. & Nash, C. (2010). *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting queer theories and social science research*. New York, NY: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315603223.

- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. London, UK: Taylor and Francis. DOI: 10.4324/9780203499627
- Camfield, D. (2019). Settler Colonialism and labour studies in Canada. *Labour / Le Travail*, 83(83), 147–172. DOI: 10.1353/lt.2019.0006
- Canadian Labour Congress. (n.d.). *Who we are*.
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MiDodEJNojdTI95qw56she7XbygAUcmF3WXK8hMllqI/edit#>
- CBC News. (2020, Jul 16). Half of LGBTQ people surveyed hide sexuality at work in Sudbury, Windsor. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/lgbtq-workplace-research-1.5652057>
- Chowdbury, E. H., Pulido, L., Heynen, N., Rini, L., Wainwright, J. Inayatullah, N., & Nagar, R. (2016). *Muddying the Waters: Coauthoring feminisms across scholarship and activism*. Illinois, USA: University of Illinois Press. DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2016.1221880
- Cockburn, C. (1984). Introduction: Trade Unions and the Radicalizing of Socialist Feminism. *Feminist Review*, (16), 43-46.
- Collins, P. (2019). Intersectionality and resistant knowledge projects. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (pp. 87-120). New York, USA: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478007098-005>
- Combahee River Collective. (1977). A black feminist statement. In Z. Einstein (Ed.), *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. NY, USA: Monthly Review Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299. DOI:10.2307/1229039
- CUPE. (2001). A CUPE mini dictionary of union language. Retrieved from <https://cupe.ca/cupe-mini-dictionary-union-language>
- DeSouza, E. R., Wesselmann, E. D., & Ispas, D. (2017). Workplace discrimination against sexual minorities: Subtle and not-so-subtle. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 34(2), 121–132. DOI:10.1002/cjas.1438
- Driskill, Q-L. (2010). Doubleweaving Two-Spirit critiques: Building alliances between native and queer studies. *GLQ* 16(1-2), 69-92. DOI:[10.1215/10642684-2009-013](https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2009-013)
- Duggan, L. (2002). The New Homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo and D. Nelson (Eds.), *Materializing Democracy: Towards a Revitalized Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- England, K. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 80-89. DOI: 10.1111/j.0033-0124.1994.00080.x
- Farnhill, T. (2018). Union renewal and workplace greening- three case studies. *BJIR An International Journal of Employment Relations*, 56(4), 716-743. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12293>
- Foley, J.R. & Baker, P.L.(Eds.). (2009). *Unions, equity, and the path to renewal*. BC, Canada: UBC Press.
- Honey, M. K. (2001). Black workers remember: An oral history of segregation, unionism and the freedom struggle. *Work, Employment & Society*, 15(2), 428-430. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23747940>
- Hunt, G. & Eaton, J. (2007). We are family: Labour responds to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender workers. In G. Hunt and D. Rayside (Eds.), *Equity, Diversity, and Canadian Labour* (pp. 130-155). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Jackson, A. & Thomas, M. P. (2017). *Work and Labor in Canada, Third Edition: Critical Issues*. Toronto, Canada: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.
- Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Keenan, D. (2015). Is another unionism possible? Solidarity unionism in the industrial workers of the world in the U.S. and Canada. *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, 18(2), 211-229. DOI: [10.1111/wusa.12171](https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12171)
- Kennelly, I. (2002). "I Would Never Be a Secretary": Reinforcing gender in segregated and integrated occupations. *Gender & Society*, 16(5), 603–624. DOI: 10.1177/089124302236988
- Kumar, P., and C. Schenk (Eds.).(2006). *Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experiences*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.
- Ledwith, S. (2012). Gender politics in trade unions: The representation of women between exclusion and inclusion. *European Review of Labour and Research*, 18(2), 185-199.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender workplace issues: Quick take. (2018). Catalyst. Retrieved from <https://www.catalyst.org/research/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-workplace-issues/>
- LeBlanc, S. (2021). *Unpacking union advocacy*. Personal Collection of Shila LeBlanc, Restorative Approaches Halifax, Halifax NS.
- Livingstone, D. (Producer), & Warchus, M. (Director). (2014). *Pride* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: 20th Century Fox.

- Longhurst, R. (2010). Semi-structured interviews. In N. Clifford, S. French, & G. Valentine (eds), *Key Methods in Geography (2nd ed.)* London: Sage.
- Meehan, K., & Strauss, K. (2015). *Precarious Worlds: Contested geographies of social reproduction*. GA, USA: University of Georgia Press.
- Milkman, R. (2016). *On Gender, Labor, and Inequality*. IL, USA: University of Illinois Press. <https://doi.org/10.5406/j.ctt18j8wg9>
- Miserandino, C. (2013). *The Spoon Theory*. Retrieved from www.butyoudontlooksick.com/the_spoon_theory
- Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum*, 30(4), 337-350.
- Nowak, R., & Haynes, J. (2018). Friendships with benefits? Examining the role of friendship in semi-structured interviews in music research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 21(4), 425– 438.
- Pascoe et al., (2020). Holding space for alternative futures in academia and beyond. *Antipode Online*. Retrieved from <https://antipodeonline.org/2020/04/22/holding-space-for-alternative-futures-in-academia-and-beyond/>
- Pride at Work Canada. (2016). *Building a Nation Where LGBT Canadians can Achieve their Full Potential at Work* [Report]. Retrieved from <https://prideatwork.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Pride-at-Work-Canada.pdf>
- Pride at Work Canada. (2020). *In case you missed it: Two-Spirit inclusion in the workplace*. Retrieved from <https://prideatwork.ca/2020/06/25/in-case-you-missed-it-two-spirit-inclusion-in-the-workplace/>
- Rise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism. (2020, November 12). *Labour Movement and Women's Equality*. <https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/issues-actions/labour-movement-and-womens-equality/>
- Robertson, D. C. (2017). Meet the two-spirit people fighting to be included in Canada's reconciliation process. *Xtra Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://xtramagazine.com/power/meet-the-two-spirit-people-fighting-to-be-included-in-canadas-reconciliation-process-77916>
- Ross, S. (2007). Varieties of social unionism: Towards a framework of comparison. *Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Society*, (11), 16-34. Duke University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41440667>
- Rubin, G. S. (2012). Of catamites and kings: Reflections on butch, gender, and boundaries. *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. 471-481. DOI: 10.1215/9780822394068-011

- OutSaskatoon. (n.d.) Two Spirit. Retrieved from https://www.outsaskatoon.ca/two_spirit1
- Pilemalm, S., Hallberg, N., & Timpka, T. (2001). How Do Shop Stewards Perceive Their Situation and Tasks? Preconditions for Support of Union Work. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 22(4), 569–599. DOI: [10.1177/0143831X01224006](https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X01224006)
- Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. (n.d.) *Solidarity and Pride*. <http://www.sfl.sk.ca/about-us/our-committees/solidarity-pride>
- Sasso, T. & Ellard-Gray, A. (2015). In and out: Diverging Perspectives on LGBT Inclusion in the Workplace. *Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion*. <https://ccdi.ca/media/1070/20150528-report-lgbt-inclusion-in-the-workplace-en.pdf>
- Smith, D. (2019). Confronting limits, pushing boundaries: LGBTQ education and activism. *Cracking Labour's Glass Ceiling: Transforming Lives Through Women's Education; Foreword by Barbara Byers*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Statistics Canada. (2018). Unionization rates falling. *Canadian Megatrends*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015005-eng.htm> (accessed 2019).
- Stinson, J. & Richmond, P. (1993). Women Working for Unions: Female Staff and the Politics of Transformation. *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy, and Militancy*. In L. Briskin and P. McDermott (Eds.). Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
- Sweeney, J. (1999). The Growing Alliance between Gay and Union Activists. *Social Text*, (61), 31-38. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488677>
- Tattersall, A. (2010). *Power in coalition : strategies for strong unions and social change*. NY, USA: Cornell University Press.
- Tiffe, R. (2013). Towards a queerer labor movement: The politics and potential of LGBT-labor coalitions (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, MN.
- The First Nations Information Governance Centre. (2014). Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP™): The Path to First Nations Information Governance. (pp.1-48). The First Nations Information Governance Centre.
- Tremonti, A. (2019, May 15). What today's labour movement can learn from the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. *CBC Radio*.
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending Damage. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79, 409-427.

- UBC. (n.d.). Getting started. *Two-Spirit & Indigiqueer Studies*. Retrieved from <https://guides.library.ubc.ca/twospiritandindigenousqueerstudies#s-lg-box-15925164>
- UCLA Labor Center & OUTReach: UFCW LGBTQ+ Labor and Allies. (2020). *Union Values and LGBTQ+ Worker Experiences: A survey of UFCW workers in the United States and Canada*. https://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UCLA_Labor_Center_LGBTQWorkers_Oct7.pdf
- Vaid, U. (2001). Imagining the Gay–Labor Alliance: A Forum. In K. Krupat. & P. McCreery (Eds.), *Out at Work: Building a Gay-Labor Alliance* (pp. 232-257). University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttshfz.18>
- Valentine, D. (2007). *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham, USA: Duke University Press.
- Voss, K. (2010). Democratic dilemmas: union democracy and union renewal. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 16(3). 369–382. DOI: 10.1177/1024258910373868
- Waite, S. (2020). Should I stay or should I go? Employment discrimination and workplace harassment against transgender and other minority employees in Canada’s federal public service. *Journal of Homosexuality*. DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2020.1712140
- Yates, C. (2019). Women are key to union renewal: Lessons from the Canadian labour movement. *Paths to Union Renewal* (pp. 103-112). Toronto: University of Toronto Press. DOI: 10.3138/9781442602236-008

Appendix A.

Interview Guiding Questions

1. How are you doing?
2. Can you tell me a bit about your understanding of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within BCGEU?
 - a. A) historically?
 - b. B) recently?
3. Can you share which advocacy strategies come to mind throughout your time at BCGEU-LGBTQ2S+ or otherwise?
4. Can you think of any examples of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy strategies that have evolved or changed since you've been with BCGEU?
5. What are some strengths of BCGEU's advocacy strategies for LGBTQ2S+ workers?
6. What are some areas of growth for BCGEU's advocacy strategies for LGBTQ2S+ workers?
7. Can you tell me about any LGBTQ2S+ education or training methods you've found helpful/impressive?
 - a. Can you tell me about any LGBTQ2S+ education or training methods you've found problematic?
 - b. What made it good/bad? Do you have any examples?
8. Do you feel that you need to change anything about your own identity or expression to fit in with the culture at BCGEU?
 - a. Does this change from setting to setting (i.e. local meetings vs at work vs at BCGEU convention, etc?)
 - b. Does your comfort level shift throughout these union settings?
9. Can you tell me about your feelings about being unionized? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?
10. Can you tell me about the role you see unions playing in Canada at this time?
11. Do you have any other thoughts you want to share? Be them about LGBTQ advocacy or otherwise?

Appendix B.

Recruitment Email



Are you a union member of BCGEU and interested in participating a project with Simon Fraser University (SFU) on union LGBTQ2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirit) advocacy in Western Canada?

My name is Sarah Cibart, and I am currently a Master's student at SFU. I am looking for volunteers to speak with who are members of the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU), to better understand how members understand and perceive BCGEU's current and past efforts of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy. Participants of all identities are welcome.

If you're interested in participating in an online video or call interview for approximately 30-60 minutes (with one possible follow-up interview and optional self disclosure demographic questionnaire), or have any questions about the project, please send an email to [REDACTED]

Thank you,
Sarah Cibart

Appendix C.

Consent Form



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Information & Consent Form

“Queering the Canadian Labour Movement: LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the BC Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU)”

Project Team

Sarah Cibart- Principal Investigator

MA Student, Simon Fraser University

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies

Email: [redacted]

Tiffany Muller Myrdahl- Senior Supervisor

Senior Lecturer, Simon Fraser University

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies

Email: [redacted]

Kendra Strauss- Committee Member

Associate Professor, Simon Fraser University

Director of the Labour Studies Program & The Morgan Centre for Labour Research

Email: [redacted]

Study Funding

This project was funded in part by a 12 month Canadian Graduate Scholarship- Masters Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Background

You are invited to participate in a project seeking to better understand how the Canadian labour movement, namely, the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) performs and exhibits LGBTQ2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, Two-Spirit) advocacy. For my project, I want to hear from BCGEU rank and file members, staff, and elected leaders belonging to “one of BC’s largest and most diverse unions” on their understandings and experiences of LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within the union, and how these perspectives differ between the groups of members, staff, and leaders. From this project, I hope to have feedback for future LGBTQ2S+ advocacy, policy, resolution, education, and training efforts within the Canadian labour movement (BCGEU in particular). As union density in Canada has been declining (15% decline from 1981 to 2014 according to Statistics Canada), I am further wanting to consider the ways LGBTQ2S+ and other social justice advocacy tools could or do contribute to rebuilding union density, both within BCGEU and the broader Canadian labour movement.

Why are we doing this study?

You are invited in participating in this research study because we want to learn more about LGBTQ2S+ advocacy within unions through the perspective and experiences of its members, staff, and elected leaders.

Is your participation voluntary?

Absolutely. Your participation is always voluntary throughout the process. You may refuse to participate, or refuse to answer any questions (including the demographic information questionnaire), or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or questions. If you decide to withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study and have it destroyed. The principal investigator may request another interview to ask follow-up questions, however, your agreement to participate in an initial interview does not obligate further participation.

How is the study done?

If you agree to participate in this study, you'll be asked to participate in an online interview via web-based platform (such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams) or phone interview that will last about 30-60 minutes. Topics covered in the interview may include your knowledge, experiences, and/or critiques of BCGEU's strategies surrounding LGBTQ2S+ advocacy and other social justice issues, your perspective on communication methods from BCGEU, and questions to gain better understanding about promotion and leadership within BCGEU. With your permission the interview will be audio and/or video recorded and transcribed by the principal investigator. There will be an optional form for you to self disclose details about your identity (i.e. gender, race, ability), which will only be linked to your pseudonym.

Are there any risks in participating in this study?

There are few anticipated risks to you in participating in this study, as it is possible feelings of emotional or psychological distress in recounting workplace/union experiences related to gender and/or sexual identity (or other trauma based experiences). In extreme cases, these recounts could cause a feeling of re-traumatization. You are free to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If desired, arrangements can be made to send the transcript of your interview so you can make any changes you like (in case you say something that you later wish to change or retract). The default position on this consent form is that your identity will remain confidential and your identity will not be disclosed. You have the right to decide whether the interview is conducted by online video or phone call, and whether it is recorded through video or audio only. By agreeing to participate in an interview using a web-based platform such as Zoom/Microsoft Teams, you understand that the software cannot be guaranteed as secure.

What are the benefits of participating?

The benefits of this project are mainly long term and broad (rather than specific to you). These benefits could include gained knowledge on effective/ineffective LGBTQ2S+ advocacy methods by BCGEU, improving training and policies, and/or contributing to academic scholarship and history.

How will your privacy be maintained?

With your permission, quotes from your interview will be used confidentially in publications or presentations arising from this research. Your words and information will be attributed to a pseudonym and all identifying information will be removed. At any point during or

after the interview you may ask that a part of the discussion be deleted from the record, destroyed, and not used in any research outputs. Both the principal researcher (Sarah) and research supervisor (Tiffany) will have access to the interview transcripts.

All data will be stored and password-protected on SFU's Vault storage system. A password known only by the principal investigator will be required to access the data. The interview audio files will be destroyed after transcription, and transcriptions and other data will be destroyed by the principal investigator after a maximum of 10 years.

How will your information be used?

The results of this study will be primarily reported in Sarah Cibart's graduate thesis. Future uses are unknown, but information could be presented and/or written up for academic conferences, journal articles, and/or a book by Sarah Cibart. Additionally, results will be shared within BCGEU (such as local meetings and staff meetings), and/or at union conventions/education schools throughout Canada. The de-identified data of your interview transcript may be shared with other researchers studying labour in the service sector.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

Please contact Sarah Cibart at any time if you have questions about the study, or if you misunderstand something about your role within it. You may also contact senior supervisor Tiffany Muller-Myrdahl.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics.

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your employment or livelihood.

I agree to have the interview be video recorded.

I agree to have the interview be audio recorded.

I agree to be quoted confidentially in any research write-ups or presentations.

I would like to receive a copy of my transcript for review before use in the study.

I give my permission to be contacted in the future for follow up questions.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____

Date(yyyy/mm/dd) ____/____/____

Printed name of the participant _____

Contact information (email or
phone) _____

Appendix D.

Demographic Information Form



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Please provide basic personal background information to help us learn more about you relative to other research participants. For questions that you feel are not applicable or that you prefer not to answer, please write NA or PNA.

Name:

Pseudonym*:

Role within BCGEU

(Elected Leader, Staff Member, or General Member):

Number of Years involved with BCGEU:

Gender:

Pronouns:

Sexuality:

Age:

Mother Tongue:

Ethnicity:

Nationality:

First 3 Digits of Postal Code:

(Dis)ability:

*pseudonym is an alterative name to how people know you to allow your identity to remain confidential for the sakes of this project. Only the principle researcher will have access to this

document linking your “real” name to pseudonym, and any response you provide will be linked to your pseudonym.